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Probation Officers' Experiences Working With Individuals Who Have Antisocial Personality Traits

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

In fulfilling their role of monitoring individuals outside of a prison setting, probation officers may encounter individuals who have antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) or antisocial personality (ASP) traits. Individuals who have ASP traits and are not diagnosed with ASPD are still impacted by recommendations of punishment, higher recidivism rates, and a lack of treatment resources provided. Individuals in the criminal justice system with ASP traits are not a new phenomenon, but there is a lack of research on the probation officers' experience working with these individuals. The purpose of this study was to examine and explore the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits and to gather more knowledge on how the experiences of probation officers play a role in the criminal justice system. Social cognitive theory was used to identify the factors related to the experiences of probation officers; provide understanding on the functions of the criminal justice system; and provide insight as to why individuals make certain choices, such as recommendations of punishment. Data were collected by conducting semi structured interviews with nine probation officers who had experience working with individuals who have ASP traits. The findings revealed that probation officers' experience working with individuals who have ASP traits can reveal a bias, can affect the recommendations officers make to judges, and can lead to feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed. This study contributes to positive social change by offering insight into the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits, address biases, and lack of training resources within the criminal justice system.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to both of my sons, Nathan and Travis, who I hope this inspires them to chase their dreams and to never give up. Despite the obstacles that may be presented, perseverance will light your way. I aspire to teach you that knowledge is power. I love you, my boys.

To my mother, the person who has been on this journey with me since my first day of kindergarten. I will never forget telling you I wanted to become a lawyer at five years old, and you never letting me forget to accomplish my goals. I now get to add this degree next to my Juris Doctorate. The person who has shown up to every milestone in my life, and the milestones of my boys. You never hesitated to support me on this journey I decided to embark on. Through you, I have been able to learn to be better, to be determined, and to never give up. Something I hope to pass on to Nathan and Travis.

To my other half, the person who put school on pause to let me pursue this journey, I decided to do on a whim. The person who has stepped up to take care of the boys when I needed you. I won't forget making you read my drafts multiple times to know what you thought and what improvements I could make. We did it!

Thank you!

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I did not think I would make it to this point. At times, the journey seemed impossible and as if there was no light at the end of the tunnel. Every time I strayed and seemed to lose motivation, there you were to bring me right back. Dr. Teaonna Watson, I would not be here without your support. Allowing me to vent when I needed to or finding a way to motivate me and complete my goals made this journey worthwhile.

I would also like to thank my committee member, Andrea Goldstein, for her continued support, quick response, and being able to push me to be better. Dr. Goldstein's expertise and feedback helped push me to be a better researcher.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. I am forever grateful and could not have done this without Nathan, Travis, Nelly, and Frank. Finally, to the participants of this study, I am honored and speechless by your selflessness in participating in this research study and sharing your experiences. Trusting a stranger with your day-to-day is humbling.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Harsher punishments and higher recidivism rates have been reported in the United States criminal justice system. Statistics show that individuals with mental health issues who are on probation report higher rates of recidivism, harsher punishments, and a lack of training resources (Schrader et al., 2018). In 2021, an estimated 5,400,000 people were under the supervision of adult correctional systems in the United States, a decline since 2002. About 60% of these individuals are supervised in the community by probation officers, thus causing a strain on probation agencies. J. E. Johnson et al. (2023) estimated that there are about 10,000,000 individuals with mental health problems who interact with the U.S. criminal legal system a year.

Understanding probation officers' experience was important to understand what individuals believe will contribute to decreasing recidivism rates, training resources, and burnout. While there is research on probation officers and their experiences working with individuals who are diagnosed with an antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), there is a lack of research on individuals who do not meet the criteria but rather exhibit traits. There is a correlation between the impact of offender managers' consulting on their knowledge of personality disorders and their attitudes towards working with offenders (Ramsden et al., 2014).

The scholarly community had a lack of knowledge on the experiences of probation officers when working with individuals who have antisocial personality (ASP) traits to understand what factors can decrease recidivism rates and increase treatment resources. Chapter 1 provided a review of the background, problem statement, purpose of

the study, research question, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and summary, as well as a transition to the literature review in Chapter 2.

Background

A number of researchers have studied the connection between mental health and the criminal justice system. There are millions of individuals with a mental health illness who come in contact with the U.S. criminal legal system each year (J. E. Johnson et al., 2023). The correctional system can be viewed as the largest institution in the country that deals with individuals who have mental health concerns, which serves as the reason for conducting this research study. For example, Berryessa and Wohlstetter (2019) researched how the label of being a psychopath can impact the views of those who are recommending harsher punishments. The findings yielded that there was a label of psychopathy that would correlate to harsher punishments.

Research has been conducted on burnout, lack of training, and lack of funding when it involves probation officers working with individuals with a mental health concern (Edens et al., 2018). Individuals working in the criminal justice system reported feeling burned out, which impacted their employment. There has been a correlation between emotional exhaustion and absenteeism, and depression amongst correctional officers (Neveu, 2007). The perception of correctional officers has been linked to an individual's willingness to participate in rehabilitative programs (Greineder, 2013).

While the research was clear that there is a need for funding and training resources, it was not clear how probation officers' experiences impacted individuals who

have a mental health illness. The research previously conducted demonstrated a need for further research into the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have a mental health illness, specifically ASP traits. Ramsden et al. (2014) conducted a pilot study that focused on providing offender managers with consultation on their knowledge and understanding of personality disorder and their attitudes toward working with this population, to include confidence and competence in supervising these individuals.

Problem Statement

Over the years, there has been some progress in providing probation officers with training and resources on how to work with individuals who are in the criminal justice system and have a mental illness. There has been the implementation of training and prerequisites to apply to be a probation officer. Mental health professionals employed in the correctional system are provided with a variety of trainings in order to assist in various roles such as de-escalation of a crisis, conducting assessments, and providing individual and group treatment (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004). Despite this progress, individuals who have ASP traits and are not diagnosed with a personality disorder are still impacted by recommendations of punishment, higher recidivism rates, and a lack of treatment resources provided (Schrader et al., 2018). Individuals in the criminal justice system with ASP traits are not a new phenomenon, but there is a lack of research on the probation officers' experience supervising and working with these individuals.

The role of the probation officer is to evaluate, supervise, and provide recommendations within the criminal justice system (U.S. courts.gov). These probation

officers are working with individuals who have ASP traits and are burned out, lack training, or lack resources to properly supervise these individuals, in turn increasing recidivism rates. This study aimed to address the lack of research conducted on probation officers' experiences working with individuals who do not meet criteria for ASPD but rather have ASP traits.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine and explore the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits and to gather more knowledge on how the experiences of probation officers play a role in the criminal justice system.

Research Question

The research question for this study was, What are the experiences of probation officers working with adults with ASP traits?

Theoretical Framework

I used Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT) as the basis for understanding how certain factors influence human learning behaviors. The learned behavior allowed the researcher to understand the experiences and the way probation officers deal with different cases involving ASP traits. To understand the research question, an individual needed to understand how SCT's learned behavior applies to experiences. Furthermore, it was applied to the understanding of a probation officer's experiences working with an individual with ASP traits.

Bandura (1986) considered how environmental and cognitive/behavioral factors influence human learning and behavior. The focus of SCT is on how learned behavior occurs through the process of observing others. SCT was applied to the proposed research study in various aspects: (a) because it identified the factors related to the experience of the probation officers, (b) guided scholarly readers on the functions of the criminal justice system, and (c) provided insight as to why individuals make certain choices, such as recommendations of punishment (Bandura, 1986).

Nature of the Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design included a phenomenological approach used to obtain the probation officers' experience working with individuals with ASP traits (Patton, 2015). My research question focused on probation officers' experiences working with adults who have ASP traits, and I was interested in gathering information to understand an area that had not been researched. Using a phenomenological approach, the study was qualitative to obtain the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits.

A qualitative methodology focused on experiences and how individuals process experiences. I used qualitative methods with a phenomenological focus using semi structured interviews with probation officers who work with individuals who have ASP traits. The primary data collection sources were phone interviews. The data gathered from the participants was used to develop and enhance programs that are aimed at addressing the experiences of the probation officers and their impact on individuals with ASP traits.

Definitions

Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD): A personality disorder that is characterized by a limited capacity for empathy and a long-term pattern of disregard or violation of the rights of others (APA, 2022).

Antisocial personality (ASP) *traits*:

> The display of symptoms that are not enough to not meet diagnosis, such as repeatedly breaking laws, repeated lying or conning others for personal profit or pleasure, impulsivity, irritability and reckless disregard for the safety of self or others, failure to sustain consistent work or honor financial obligations, and lack of remorse (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022, p. 659).

Criminal justice system: A system that consists of three main components: law enforcement agencies, courts, and agencies for detaining and supervising offenders.

Probation officer: A law enforcement official who supervises individuals who have been released from incarceration but are still under the supervision of the criminal justice system (Probation Officer Edu, n.d.).

Psychopathy: A condition—considered a "moral illness" that does not impact competency to stand trial, intellect, or an insanity claim (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019).

Serious mental illness caseload: A smaller caseload assigned to probation officers who have mental health training (Epperson et al., 2012).

Stereotype: something conforming to a fixed or general pattern (Merriam-Webster, 2003).

Assumptions

This qualitative study included several assumptions about the participants. The first assumption I had was that the participants would be reluctant to fully share their experiences due to the nature of their work and ethical concerns. Another assumption I had was that male participants would be reserved in terms of their willingness to talk about their emotions in regard to burnout and feeling overwhelmed. Watkins (2019) brings forth the discussion that traditional masculine roles tend to prevent men from sharing their personal issues due to restricting emotions. The use of open-ended questions facilitated in-depth responses to avoid leading the participants to answer one way or another.

Scope and Delimitations

The study's participants included probation officers in the United States who have actively worked with individuals who have ASP traits. In this study, the researcher focused on their experiences when working with individuals who have ASP traits. Excluded from participating in this study were probation officers who had not worked with individuals who have ASP traits. I did not include any probation officers with whom the researcher had a personal relationship in order to prevent any preconceived biases due to an existing relationship. I did not include any individuals who were previously incarcerated where I am employed. Transferability was increased by explaining the context of the research and the sample of the participants.

Limitations

When conducting a research study, one can come across limitations. A potential limitation can be the number of participants in the study. Not being able to obtain a large number of participants could limit the information being received during the interview process. Another limitation involves ethics and confidentiality because probation officers work in the criminal justice system, and they can unintentionally provide confidential information about individuals with ASP traits. The probation officers may also be limited to the amount of information they can divulge during the interview process. A final limitation is the potential for biases from the researcher based on the information provided from the participant's responses to questions during the interview. I kept a record of my thoughts and feelings while being open-minded about the information I was receiving during the interview process to help me separate my biases and experiences from the participants' experiences.

Significance

J. E. Johnson et al. (2023) reported that there are tens of millions of individuals with a mental health illness who come in contact with the U.S. criminal legal system each year. The correctional system can be viewed as the largest institution in the country that deals with individuals who have mental health concerns, which serves as the reason for conducting this research study. Schrader et al. (2018) noted how it is more common for an individual to have ASP traits than an actual diagnosis due to the limitation of being able to diagnose individuals with ASPD. The limitation to having an actual diagnosis is due to funding, credibility concerns, and biases. Having ASP traits will increase the

number of individuals who are considered to have mental health concerns and are coming in contact with the U.S. criminal legal system.

I addressed the lack of research regarding the experiences of probation officers who are working with individuals who have ASP traits. I was able to capture the lived experiences of the probation officers that may have a connection to harsher punishment, lack of resources, and feelings of burnout. This research was necessary for positive social change because it allowed probation officers who have experience working in the criminal justice system to provide their experiences of individuals who have ASP traits.

Summary

Chapter 1 included a brief overview of this qualitative phenomenological study. This study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of probation officers who work with individuals who have ASP traits. My objective was to discover, examine, and document the participants' experiences. Research shows that there was a lack of research on the experience of probation officers when it comes to working with individuals who have ASP traits. There is extensive research on the correlation between punishment recommendations and individuals with mental health issues, but research is limited to the probation officers' experiences working with these individuals. Chapter 2 included an exhaustive review of the current literature as the basis of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Individuals with mental illness make up a substantial portion of adults in prison, jail, and on community supervision worldwide (Van Deinse et al., 2023). These estimates vary by country, diagnosis, criminal justice setting, and the methodology used to research. The prevalence of mental illness among prisoners in Europe, Australia, and the United States is well-documented, but less attention has been documented on probationers with mental health problems in the United States. In 2021, an estimated 5,400,000 people were under the supervision of adult correctional systems in the United States, a decline since 2014. The rate of individuals on probation or parole fell to a low in 2021 (1,440 per 100,000 adult U.S. residents). The rate of individuals on probation has had a steady decline since 2007 (2,240 per 100,000).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits. This research study helped provide insight into an area that had minimal research: probation officers' experience working with individuals with ASP traits. There had been research conducted on the correlation between mental health and harsher punishment in the criminal justice system, but not as to the experiences or how the probation officers' experience contributes to harsher punishments or higher recidivism rates.

Chapter two detailed the theoretical framework, research strategies, and literature review. This study was designed to help the scholarly community have a better understanding of the probation officers' experiences when working with individuals who

have ASP traits. The literature review contained a review of current literature related to essential concepts of ASP, the probation officer's role/biases, and treatment protocol/availability. Chapter two explained keywords and key terms used to retrieve the applicable literature utilizing the literature search strategy. The use of mental health illness, serious mental health illness, and ASP traits was used throughout this study to discuss the overarching umbrella that is mental health and the categories within. Finally, the chapter ended with a summary of the relevant literature, the purpose of this study, an overview of the theoretical framework, and the methodology being used to retrieve data.

Literature Search Strategy

Since September 2022, I assessed 101 journals and 5 databases in search of relevant literature for this study. The journals and publications in each database were related to criminal justice, psychology, mental health illness, corrections training, public policy, and behavioral sciences. The researcher in this study used 25 key search terms for its literature review, focusing on definitions, correlations, examples, characteristics of ASPD and traits, probation officer, stigma, ASPD, ASP traits, mental health, treatment, psychologist, recidivism, probationers, antisocial, offenders, mental illness, probation violation, burnout, criminal justice system, prison, legal system, harsher punishment, probation officer caseload, serious mental illness, mental health illness, and reoffending. These search terms were based on the probation officer’s experiences of working with adults who have ASP traits.

Regular searches were conducted throughout the writing of this literature review to ensure all available literature was exhausted. Alerts were set up to receive summaries

of publications that may yield similar research studies. The pertinent literature acquired throughout the literature review was cross-referenced and added if deemed necessary to answer the research question. A constant review of key search terms was conducted in order to ensure that this research study had not been conducted.

In this chapter, it was evident that the importance of studying the experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits. None of the studies reviewed focus on the probation officer's experiences working with individuals with ASP traits. The key difference is ASP traits. There was a lack of research on probation officers' experience working with individuals who have ASP traits.

Theoretical Foundation

A theoretical framework is referred to as a theory that will support the idea of a research study (Patton, 2015). The framework is used to organize and align the research study and provide knowledge of the gap in the literature. The theory that was used was Bandura's SCT. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits. The theoretical framework used aligned and provided insight into the gap in the literature and the probation officer's experiences when working with individuals with ASP traits. There had been research conducted on mental health and probation officers' recommendations for harsher punishment, but research had not been conducted on the experience or the way the probation officer's mind processes the experience when working with individuals with ASP traits.

Social Cognitive Theory

I used Bandura's (1986) SCT as the basis for understanding how certain factors influence human learning behaviors. The learned behavior allowed me to understand the experiences and the way probation officers deal with different cases involving ASP traits. To understand the research question, an individual needed to understand how SCT's learned behavior applies to experiences. Furthermore, it was applied to the understanding of a probation officer's experiences working with an individual with ASP traits.

SCT considers how environmental and cognitive/behavioral factors influence human learning and behavior (Bandura, 1986). The focus of SCT is on how learned behavior occurs through the process of observing others. Albert Bandura is the founding father who proposed SCT and believes that observational learning cannot occur unless cognitive processes are at work. Bandura believed individuals did not observe behavior and then imitate it. Instead, he believed these individuals were thinking before imitating the behavior. In essence, an individual observing the individual may interpret it as an imitation because of what they are seeing, but the individual imitating the behavior is processing the information.

SCT was applied to the proposed research study in various aspects: (1) because it identified the factors related to the experience of the probation officers, (2) guided scholarly readers on the functions of the criminal justice system, and (3) provided insight as to why individuals make certain choices, such as recommendations of punishment (Bandura, 1986). The logical connection between the framework presented and the nature of my study included a discussion of two factors that influence the experiences of

probation officers (Bandura, 1986). The first one was environmental, otherwise known as surroundings, such as people, places, and/or things. A second factor that impacted an individual's experiences is cognitive/behavioral aspects, such as a belief system (Bandura, 1986). The experiences of probation officers are influenced by learned behavior (Lad & Walker, 2022). Thus, the use of SCT gave an understanding of how learned behaviors impact the experiences of these probation officers when dealing with individuals with ASP traits. By understanding how learned behaviors impact their experiences, we could decrease the stigma in the officer-client relationship, leading to better legal recommendations and proper treatment.

Bandura's SCT goes deeper into what happens when the gap between observing the behavior and imitating what is seen (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's SCT is not just a learned experience but goes into further detail on how the individual is processing the information they are receiving before imitating it. SCT suggests that an individual is not just shaped by their environments but rather is self-developing, self-regulating, self-reflecting, and proactive. Understanding how the individual interprets the learned behavior was essential to this study, as well as addressing the gap of lack of research.

It is important to understand that there is a negative stigma that may be learned through one's experiences. Specifically, a probation officer's experiences may indicate how individuals with ASP traits may impact how they interpret information (Lad & Walker, 2022). SCT not only applies to probation officers' workplaces regarding learned behaviors, but it can also be from other environmental factors, such as culture, previous

employment, education, economic status, etc. SCT helped us understand how learned behaviors will impact the experiences of the probation officer.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Antisocial Personality Disorder

History

In 1946, the World Health Organization established a mental health organization and held its first conference in 1948. There is no information available on mental health before 1946. In 1952, the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) was published (APA, 2022). The *DSM* helped mental health professionals have the same understanding of symptoms and diagnosis of certain mental health disorders. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (*DSM-5*) has information focused on personality disorders. A personality disorder is a condition in which an individual differs from the average person in how they think, feel, or relate to others.

ASPD falls under the category of personality disorders. Per the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision* (*DSM-5-TR*) for someone to be diagnosed with ASPD, the individual must show:

> a continuous pattern of disregard and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15, with three or more of the following: (a) failure to conform to laws and social norms (repeatedly breaking laws), (b) deceitfulness (repeated lying or conning other for personal profit or pleasure, (c) impulsivity or failure to plan ahead, (d) irritability and aggressiveness (repeated physical fights or assaults, (e)

> reckless disregard for the safety of self or others, (f) consistent irresponsibility (failure to sustain consistent work or honor financial obligations, and (e) lack of remorse (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022, p. 659).

This research study focused on ASP traits and not on an actual diagnosis of ASPD. There is research that has been conducted on the experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASPD (Lad & Walker, 2022). No research had been conducted on those who have ASP traits and do not meet the criteria for a diagnosis. Therefore, it was crucial to understand what the criteria for ASPD are and how it has progressed throughout the years. The traits used were from the *DSM-5-TR*, but the wording was tailored to the average individual's understanding (APA, 2017). It is more common for an individual to have ASP traits than an actual diagnosis due to the limitation of being able to diagnose individuals with ASPD (Schrader et al., 2018). There are limitations on resources, funding, and credibility when it comes to diagnosing an individual with ASPD, and the individual may not receive a diagnosis.

Edens et al. (2018) discussed how it is beneficial to have an understanding that research is limited for individuals with ASP traits. Having limited research on the topic of individuals with ASP traits impacts the community through higher recidivism rates. Probation officers are considered non-mental health clinicians and may not be aware of ASP traits or the criteria necessary for a mental health diagnosis. Also, a probation officer may not understand what mental health treatment is and what this treatment may entail. A Probation officer's employment responsibility may require them to make recommendations on punishment for offenders. Thus, raising the concern as to probation

officers' impact on recommendations for harsher punishments for individuals with ASP traits.

According to Steadman et al. (2009), in the United States, there are approximately 20% of incarcerated individuals suffer from a serious mental health illness. There are tens of millions of individuals with a mental health illness who come in contact with the U.S. criminal legal system each year (J. E. Johnson et al., 2023). The correctional system can be viewed as the largest mental health institution in the country, which serves as the reason for conducting this research study. Individuals who are incarcerated have a constitutional right to adequate health care, including mental health treatment. Over the years, the growth of correctional populations has placed a strain on the capacity of prisons to respond to the health needs of the individuals who are incarcerated. The authors' results yielded an estimate of 2,000,000 out of 13,000,000 annual bookings of individuals with a serious mental illness.

Personality Traits

The focus of the study was the probation officer's experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. Thus, it was important to know what personality traits are and how these personality traits are used to assess perception towards a specific vulnerable group, such as individuals with mental illness. McCrae and Costa (2003) defined personality traits as the descriptions of people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The authors mentioned that the way individuals perceive others is known as person perception, consisting of impressions and beliefs one has toward another. A

personality trait is caused by an assessment of a person's beliefs, emotions, and behavior towards the other person.

Authors John and Srivastava (1999) elaborated on the five personality traits and how these traits are used to determine stability or change in one's personal development. The five personality traits are composed of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability. These five personality traits are viewed as the general categories that lead to a more specific and distinct trait. The first personality trait, openness to experience, is defined as individuals being open-minded, creative, and accepting of others. Individuals with high rates of openness to experience are more likely to be intelligent and curious, and individuals with low rates are more likely to be closed-minded.

The second personality trait, conscientiousness, describes individuals as being organized, determined, and having high expectations for interpersonal interactions, as opposed to those who have low rates of conscientiousness and are lazy, disorganized, and careless (Sliter et al., 2015). Conscientiousness in past research has been used as a predictor of job performance, such as motivation (Parks-Leduc et al., 2015). Extraversion, the third personality trait, refers to individuals who are optimistic, sociable, and ambitious (Parks-Leduc et al., 2015). A person who is considered to be an introvert, the opposite of an extrovert, is quiet and reserved (Gosling et al., 2003).

The fourth personality trait, agreeableness, is defined as individuals being more likely to forgive and trust others. Individuals with low levels of agreeableness are more likely to be selfish, hostile, and seek domination over others (Parks-Leduc et al., 2015).

Emotional stability, the fifth personality trait, would demonstrate an individual who is calm and not neurotic. These five personality traits provide rate levels of individuals that will fall on a spectrum. When discussing ASP traits, these personality traits correlate with low-rate levels and symptoms of ASP.

Authors Parks-Leduc et al. (2015) expanded upon the notion of traits by using the five personality traits. A personality trait is usually defined as a description of an individual's patterns of behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Traits are a summary of an individual's responses and behaviors. A trait of ASP is displaying impulsive decision-making. Impulsivity would be displayed in an individual with low rates of emotional stability. Another symptom is an individual who is not able to maintain employment. The individual who cannot maintain employment would display low rates of conscientiousness. Displaying hostile/aggressive behavior and not caring for others would rate low in the agreeableness factor.

Assessment of Antisocial Personality Traits. A personality assessment tool is used to evaluate individuals who, at some point, may be diagnosed with a personality disorder or may not have sufficient symptoms to meet the criteria (Edens et al., 2018). The common tool used when dealing with individuals with personality disorders is the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). The PCL-R is a risk assessment tool for psychopathy that attempts to predict who will offend or reoffend. The PCL-R is a 20-item inventory of perceived personality traits and recorded behaviors intended to be completed in a semistructured interview (Huchzermeier et al., 2007). Evidence from the PCL-R was introduced in 87 reported appellate cases between 1991 and 2004 (DeMatteo & Edens,

2006) and in 348 appellate cases between 2005 and 2011 (DeMatteo et al., 2014). The results yielded that the prosecution is more likely to introduce results from the PCL-R into evidence to bolster legal arguments (Dematteo and Edens, 2006).

Numerous research studies have been conducted on using the PCL-R in the criminal justice system. Dematteo and Edens (2006) conducted a study where the evidence of psychopathy, like the PCL-R, had been successfully introduced by the prosecution to strengthen the argument that the defendant is a danger to others. The increased usage of the PCL-R by the prosecution suggests that the prosecutors are becoming aware of this measure and its potential to influence jurors when mental health is a concern. Dematteo et al. (2016) argued that the probative value and prejudicial impact of evidence on psychopathy, including results from the PCL-R, are most dependent on the context and area in which the evidence is presented. For example, the PCL-R results suggest the probative value to be on the offender's potential recidivism but not on treatment amenability.

Recidivism Among Individuals With Antisocial Personality Disorder

Recidivism rates among individuals who have ASPD are high for reasons of lack of treatment, lack of credibility, and lack of funding. Recidivism rates are a social problem, and it impacts society when an individual is released and returned to prison. Impacting society by having to pay tax dollars, or not being able to change their criminal behavior, and engaging in criminal activity that can harm other members of society. Two recent studies, Cox et al. (2013) and Cox et al. (2016), found that perceptions of remorselessness and interpersonal-affective characteristics of psychopathy predict

harsher punishment in white-collar crimes and capital contexts. Specifically, perceptions of the defendant's remorselessness, lack of empathy, and failure to accept responsibility predict harsher sentencing recommendations. On the contrary, Kopkin (2016) mentioned that the perception of the interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy predicts positive receptiveness and an increased perception of trustworthiness. Depending on how the individual is portrayed may influence the perception of the layperson in the community's belief about the label of psychopathy. The author discussed an experiment where the individual was presented with a list of television shows and movies that portrayed protagonists and antagonists. The participants were reluctant to choose the protagonist as a psychopath, meaning there was some association with psychopathy and "good."

Negative Stigma Toward Psychopathy

Berryessa and Wohlstetter (2019) researched how the label of being a psychopath can impact the views of those who are recommending harsher punishments. The study revealed a correlation between the label of psychopathy, harsher recommendations of punishment, and higher recidivism rates. The term psychopathy has been traditionally linked to individuals who are perceived to be dangerous, evil, violent, and even unpredictable. Recent research has found individuals with the label of psychopathy to be considered intelligent, bold, and able to socially adapt, but also dangerous and evil (Edens et al., 2018).

The label of psychopath has a negative impact on members of society (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). The authors explained that when an individual hears the word

psychopath, thoughts of being aggressive, not credible, hostile, etc., may occur. These are words that come to mind without even interacting with the individual being labeled a psychopath. The authors mentioned how probation officers communicate amongst themselves and may "switch" certain individuals because of mental health concerns. The experience of these probation supervisors may have been "negative" and, therefore, have caused the negative stigma towards the label psychopath. The focus of this study is not on the causation but rather on gathering information on the probation officers' experiences.

The label of a psychopath is considered to have a negative stigma. Many stigmas are heard in society and, at times, are passed from one individual to another (Oostermeijer et al., 2022). The authors went into detail on how the individual who is passing the negative stigma to another individual can be a stranger, friend, family member, coworker, and so forth. A probation officer can be influenced by a negative stigma or label while at work or in their environment. There are public negative stigmas associated with mental health that involve cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. Bandura's (1986) theory explains how individuals learn behavior through observing. Observing negative stigmas or labels can influence their recommendations to judges. Oostermeijer et al. (2022) began with an explanation of how public stigma and environmental factors contribute to the negative stigma on mental health in the criminal justice system. Belief systems that mentally ill individuals are weak, unpredictable, and dangerous can lead to negative emotions of fear, frustration, or pity.

According to Oostermeijer et al. (2022), if an individual has a negative belief and emotion toward individuals with mental health issues, that can lead to negative behaviors

such as discrimination, avoidance, and exclusion. Focusing on the criminal justice system, probation officers and custodial officers play a critical role in the supervision and treatment of individuals. These individuals may have to work with or may be assigned an individual on their caseload who has a mental health issue. If the criminal justice staff has a negative stigma or bias against individuals with mental health issues, they may recommend more punitive approaches. Parole officers who are making punitive recommendations can significantly impact the recidivism rates of those individuals who are involved in the justice system and have mental health issues. Not only are recidivism rates impacted, but also the lack of treatment and training is impacted.

Criminal justice officers may not get the proper training required to work with individuals who have mental health concerns because of their personal negative beliefs or the individual providing the training's negative beliefs (Oostermeijer et al., 2022). As mentioned above, criminal justice officers play a crucial role in supervision and treatment, meaning they may not recommend the proper treatment or supervisor because of the negative stigma. The concern arises not about the limited resources for training or availability, but the lack of receptiveness to these trainings due to negative beliefs. Criminal justice officers with negative beliefs can impact those coworkers whom another individual can influence.

The label of psychopathy has a negative stigma, and a belief is promoted that the individual does not exhibit a mental illness but rather a moral illness that they are choosing to commit heinous crimes (Thi, 2016). The belief that those with a label of psychopathy should be able to control their behaviors is based on the perception that

these individuals will continue to act out and are unable to change their ways. The authors further discuss how the negative perception of those individuals with psychopathy leads to the belief that treatment is ineffective. The stigma associated with labeling an offender with psychopathy presents a few problems within the criminal justice system, particularly related to punishment (Keeler, 2017).

Environmental Biases Toward Individuals With Psychopathy

Berryessa and Wohlstetter (2019) researched how psychopathy has been linked to individuals being perceived as dangerous, evil, violent, and unpredictable, but also as bold and intelligent. The authors discussed how members of society perceive psychopathy as dangerous, evil, violent, bold, and intelligent, causing the perception of the members of society to shift from a personality disorder to a moral illness. Individuals who perceive psychopathy as a moral illness and not a disorder have created a belief that individuals with psychopathy do not want to change their choices. This has created a notion that individuals should be able to control their behaviors and refrain from acting out to reduce the belief that treatment is ineffective.

The results yielded that higher levels of punishment were placed on individuals with a label of psychopathy than on those who had no mental health concerns. Bandura (1986) mentioned how the individual processes the learned behavior before imitating the behavior. Some statistics show a correlation between labeling an individual with a psychopathic label and harsher sanctions/legal sentences. This study intends to conduct further research to focus on the experiences of probation officers working with

individuals with ASP traits to gain an understanding of how they are processing information.

Communication Between Probation Officers and Mental Health Professionals

Correctional officers and mental health professionals are two types of professionals who would benefit from communicating and working together (Fellner, 2006). Correctional officers and mental health professionals work in different capacities with individuals who may have mental health concerns. Communicating between both professions can help reduce the recidivism rates of individuals with mental health concerns. This includes having the proper training resources to understand the role correctional officers and mental health professionals play in a correctional setting.

Mental health professionals employed in the correctional system are provided with a variety of trainings in order to assist in various roles such as de-escalation of a crisis, conducting assessments, and providing individual and group treatment (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004). Psychologists working in the correctional system are in a similar position as mental health professionals in the community; the primary focus is on decreasing human suffering. Correctional officers being inadequately trained in mental health may face challenges when working with mentally ill individuals (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004; SpearIt, 2009). Limited resources in a prison setting can influence the recidivism rates of these individuals with mental health concerns (Steinberg et al., 2015).

Steinberg et al. (2015) further discussed that when mentally ill individuals are released from prison, they have few rehabilitative resources and will find themselves back in prison with few options or treatment. The perception and personality traits of

individuals who work in a correctional setting are important to how they treat mentally ill individuals. Processing an individual with a mental illness into the criminal justice system without taking into consideration their mental health would not be beneficial to their well-being, the public, or correctional personnel. The authors mentioned in their article that individuals with mental illnesses who are "in the system" will be subject to harsher punishments. The concern is shifted from mentally ill individuals who have limited resources and lack treatment to the harsher punishment they receive. Harsher punishments can impact recidivism rates, all while increasing the number of individuals who are in the criminal justice system and have mental health issues. For example, jails and prisons in California have reported an increasing number of individuals with mental health issues entering the criminal justice system. Almost 50% of individuals in these facilities have a mental health issue, which is impacting training, increasing work stressors, and limiting resources to deal with these issues.

Probation Officer Roles, Responsibilities, and Workload

The Probation Act of 1925 provided a probation system for federal courts, excluding the District of Columbia. This gave the courts the power to suspend the imposition or execution of a sentence and place defendants on probation for a period of time and conditions deemed appropriate. The Probation Act also authorized courts to appoint one or more individuals to serve as probation officers. Probation was started by a small group of volunteers who would conduct investigations for individuals in the presentencing phase (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). John Augustus was considered "the father of probation" and would provide direct services to the courts and

offenders. He was considered to be an effective spokesperson and provided guidance on probations. Before the Probation Act of 1925, various states were passing their probation laws on a local level (United States Courts, n.d.).

United States probation officers are referred to as Federal probation officers (United States Courts, n.d.) Probation officers are not only law enforcement officers but also social case workers. Their responsibility is to investigate and supervise persons charged and convicted of crimes against the United States. Most districts require that all new officers attend the federal law enforcement training center upon initial employment. Officers are eligible for a 20-year retirement and must be appointed before their 37th birthday. Certain prerequisites for hiring include a background check and submitting an application.

State probation officers have similar prerequisites for becoming a probation officer, one that requires a strong educational background (Probation Officer Edu, n.d.). The goal for state probation officers is to prepare them to work with law enforcement professionals, judges, and attorneys. Many judicial districts require the probation officer to have a higher level of education, such as a bachelor's degree. There are other judicial districts that may require or suggest a master's degree. Some states may require probation officers to complete the state police academy training. Basic requirements for virtually all states are that the probation officer is between 20–38 years of age, physically, emotionally, and mentally stable, a U.S. citizen, and has no felony convictions, to include a clean background check. Newly hired probation officers are expected to complete

training that provides them insight into basic procedures and skills before working in the field. States may require different training programs to implement within their program.

Role of a Probation Officer

A large number of districts have divided their probation officers into two units: presentence investigation units and supervision units (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). A presentence investigator conducts a comprehensive investigation into the background of the defendants who are convicted of federal crimes. After completing the investigation, they are required to submit a sentencing recommendation to the judge and may be asked to discuss their recommendation with the judge. Probation officers assigned to a supervision unit supervise felons who are released into society on supervised release or probation. Probation officers in the supervision unit must enforce court-ordered conditions and use their discretion and skills to mitigate the offenders' risk to society.

The role of the probation officer is to be an independent investigator for the court system (United States Courts, n.d.). The probation officer does not work for the government’s attorney or the defendant’s attorney. They must gather information through interviews and reviewing documents, and remain unbiased by not choosing one party's position. According to the U.S. Labor of Statistics (2023), there are about 94,500 probation officers and correctional treatment specialists employed. Probation officers are required to have short-term on-the-job training, meaning that training will be provided once the individual has been employed. This training consists of understanding policy, learning how the court system functions, including court routines, training on writing

official reports, and expectations of a probation officer (Probation Officer Edu, n.d.). Training is not only administrative but can require some physical training, such as becoming CPR certified, learning surveillance and investigation techniques, handling a firearm, and defense tactics. Depending on the district or whether employment for a probation officer is at the local level or the federal level, there can be a probationary period. This probationary period ranges from 90 days to 1 year.

The amount of weight and responsibility placed on the probation officer can mean the difference between successfully reintegrating into society and the probationer having a more damaging involvement in criminal justice (Epperson et al., 2014). Working with individuals with mental health concerns can add to the amount of responsibility placed on the probation officer. Probation officers must address and balance the dual objectives of public safety and rehabilitation, and these objectives likely impact the individuals' beliefs as well as the type of probation program the officer works for. There is an underlying assumption in the mental health courts that criminal involvement is due largely to untreated symptoms of mental illness.

Biases of Probation Officers

A bias is when someone has a skewed opinion or prejudice on a certain subject. A psychopath's label can be a bias for different individuals. It is important to understand that people possess biases that influence the way they process learned behavior. SCT explains how the individual is processing the behavior that they are observing. SCT can be interpreted to explain how a bias is developed and how it can be applied to one's daily life. A probation officer is exposed to different environmental factors, which can cause

biases. The criminal justice system is considered to be a foundation based on punitive measures (Carr & Hillbrand, 2022). These punitive measures can include mandatory treatment, probation, rule violations, solitary confinement, etc. Berryessa and Wohlstetter (2019) discussed biases within the individuals working with those who have been incarcerated and have mental health concerns. Understanding the effects of biases on the probation officers' experience was important to gather more information on the limited information available on probation officers' experiences. These biases come from a negative stigma on mental health and the label of psychopathy. The label of psychopathy applied to an individual on probation causes a negative recommendation due to the bias the probation officer may develop from the stigma of mental health and psychopathy.

Lad and Walker (2022) mentioned a connection between higher rates of recall back to the prison and individuals with ASPD. Probation officers have a notion that individuals with ASPD will display aggression, impulsivity, and be "treatment resistant." The authors discussed the negative stigma created by mental health clinicians that will send individuals with ASPD back to more secure conditions. Mental health clinicians work closely with individuals in the criminal justice system.

Lack of Training

Edens et al. (2018) focused on legal and ethical issues in the assessment of psychopathy. Psychopathy has been impacting the legal field and is directly bearing weight on the ethical use of assessment instruments to measure a personality disorder. An individual being given the term "psychopath" plays a role in the legal issues. When nonclinicians are provided with information about "psychopaths," this has an influence

on their attitudes and their adjudication in criminal and juvenile justice systems. This article was significant to the literature because it talked about the history of ASP and what type of testing is used to diagnose and address biases and ethics.

Edens et al. (2018) provided an understanding of potential biases from clinicians facilitating the PCL-R, as well as the non-mental health clinicians who will receive this report and make recommendations in the legal system. This research study focused on probation officers, who are non-mental health clinicians who receive a report with the individual's results and make an assessment. The probation officer's reading of the clinicians' opinion on the report can become a learned behavior and influence how the probation officer will process the experience with individuals with ASP traits. As mentioned previously, Bandura (1986) discussed how the individual observing the behavior is forming a thought process before imitating the behavior. Thus, the probation officer is processing the report before potentially imitating the clinician's opinion.

A probation officer makes punishment recommendations to the judge and, through learned behaviors, can be rooted in biases (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). Harsher punishments for individuals with labels of "psychopathy" can occur. Studies have revealed that probation officers have negative feelings, such as mistrust, and coping responses when dealing with individuals with ASPD (Lad & Walker, 2022). This negative stigma has made probation officers reluctant to work with individuals who meet the criteria for ASPD and are considered to have higher rates of recidivism.

Working with individuals with ASPD presents challenges to those in the criminal justice system. Lad and Walker (2022) conducted a study that focused on the experiences

of probation officers working with individuals who were diagnosed with ASPD. The study focused on three themes: internal feelings, strategies employed, and external challenges. The probation officers mentioned internalizing negative feelings, such as mistrust and coping responses. Professionals may be reluctant to work with individuals who have been diagnosed with ASPD. This can be attributed to the belief that individuals with ASPD present with high-risk behaviors.

The researchers focused on a specific *DSM* diagnosis, ASPD, and the focus of this study will be on individuals who do not meet the criteria for a diagnosis but rather display traits. This study was beneficial to my research because it mentions the probation officers' experiences and the connection to being reluctant to work with them (Lad & Walker, 2022). Their research study used Bandura's (1986) SCT as the theoretical framework, and how individuals learn behavior through experiences. These authors provided research professionals, mental health professionals, and the criminal legal system with insight into those individuals with ASP diagnoses. My research study focused on probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. Research has been conducted that provides information on how these individuals have not been diagnosed due to not meeting criteria, funding issues, or credibility concerns (Schrader et al., 2018). Also, it gave insight into the fact that there is a gap in the literature when it came to probation officers' experiences when working with individuals who have ASP traits.

The rates of reoffending are high amongst released male individuals who have a personality disorder. Bruce et al. (2017) discussed the need for an innovative intervention

to help reduce offending and increase the staff's confidence in working with these individuals. The study tried to introduce an intervention that consists of training and consulting on the term “psychologically informed practice” within community-based “approved premises” for offenders. One group of individuals was exposed to the training and consulting, and the other group was not. The two groups were followed over the course of 12 months. The results yielded significant improvements for the group exposed to the intervention. The staff who were trained and supported in psychologically informed practices also demonstrated a great sense of personal accomplishment. Following the initial staff training on psychologically informed practice, the staff who implemented the psychologically informed practice into their treatment groups noted a significantly lower rate of warnings and recalls back to prison.

Training and an understanding of mental health are common concerns among individuals with personality disorders and recidivism rates. Lack of training can be a factor in the negative stigma when it comes to those with a personality disorder (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). Training and even direct therapeutic work can impact the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASPT. Clark and Chuan (2016) conducted a study that was based on providing training to probation officers. These authors explored the theory of what the outcome may be if probation officers conducted some direct therapeutic work. The individuals in this study had behaviors associated with personality disorders, but were not necessarily diagnosed. The rates of recall or reoffending dropped by two-thirds when probation officers were provided with training on how to work with individuals who present with behaviors

consistent with a personality disorder. Probation officers who are receiving training were important to understand how their environment can impact their experiences and how they process the information being received.

Ethical Concerns of Probation Officers

Psychopathic labeling and stigma may impact other aspects of criminal justice related to punishment (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). Psychopathic traits are required to be assessed in some states during civil commitment evaluations of sexually violent predators in risk assessments. The presentation of evidence has grown over the last 3 decades, even though some of the evidence presented shows that PCL-R scores may be unreliable in sexually violent predator contexts. Psychopathy assessments have also been increasingly used within the court system to inform others, particularly probation officers, of the courts' decisions and the potential risk of recidivism of the defendant. Murrie et al. (2005) mentioned how literature has found less “sympathy” for individuals labeled with psychopathy. The author also mentions the perception that a person labeled with psychopathy does not need and cannot receive professional help. An individual having less “sympathy” and believing individuals with psychopathy cannot receive treatment is reinforcing a bias. These biases and negative perceptions can cause the individual not to recommend treatment to individuals with a label of psychopathy. The focus shines away from the label of psychopathy itself and moves towards biases and outcomes.

There have been numerous simulation studies conducted to understand how evidence concerning psychopathic traits may influence non-mental health professionals'

attitudes toward “psychopaths” (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). Many studies have compared the results of an individual with a psychopathic label to an individual who has no mental health diagnosis. Research showed that labeling an individual with psychopathy is complicated because there are various ways an individual can categorize psychopathy. There have also been studies that compare the results of an individual with a psychopathic label to a defendant with a different psychiatric label (Blais & Forth, 2014). Studies have shown two different perspectives on psychopathy: when the individual is diagnosed with psychopathy and when the individual is described as having a high level of psychopathic traits (Murrie et al., 2005). It is important to note that various studies have been conducted on understanding psychopathic labeling and biases, and the results vary depending on the context of psychopathy. For example, viewing the individual as having psychopathy vs. the individual having a high level of psychopathic traits. These different experiences and viewpoints on psychopathy refer to Bandura's (1986) SCT and learned experiences.

Cognitive/Behavioral Aspects of Probation Officer Burnout

Burnout is described as the feeling of being overwhelmed and can lead to emotional, social, psychological, and physical health problems (Dollard et al., 2001). Griffin et al. (2012) stated that job characteristics are important in shaping an employee's outcome. Feeling burned out can lead to decreased work ethic, poor interactions with individuals, and withdrawal (Cieslak et al., 2008). Cieslak et al., (2008) conducted a study to understand the relationship between correctional officers' emotional intelligence and opinions about mental illness and to identify if burnout moderated the relationship

between the variables. This article was significant to the research study because it investigates environmental factors and surroundings that can provide an understanding of how opinions are learned behaviors that can lead to burnout. The authors wanted to see if coping and social support would mediate the effects of temperamental endurance. The results yielded that social support from work was negatively related to personal accomplishment. An individual feeling stressed at work can lead to burnout. Dowden and Tellier (2004) conducted a meta-analysis on the predictors of work stress for correctional officers, including a lack of participation in decision-making, job dissatisfaction, low work commitment, turnover intention, perceived dangerousness of work, and role stress variables. An important aspect to consider was how our belief system can impact our experiences (Geller & Curtis, 2011). Probation officers may have a belief system that can differ from other individuals. The cognitive and behavioral components are important to consider when conducting research on the experiences of probation officers who work with individuals with ASP traits. Research informs us of the differences in beliefs between those who are in the mental health field, such as psychologists, as compared to those who are not in the mental health field but have the same exposure. Individuals with mental health illnesses may present with behavioral management problems that typical jails or prisons are not prepared to handle (Carr & Hillbrand, 2022).

Officers frequently have interactions with offenders who are mentally ill, and oftentimes, these officers play an important role in treatment (Snyder et al., 2022); still, little information is known about the officers' attitudes and opinions towards these types of offenders. Adams and Ferrandino (2008) discussed the importance of expanding

knowledge of the relationship between officers' opinions of mental illness, emotional intelligence, burnout, mental health training, and negative stigma, and help lower recidivism rates. The results yielded that correctional officers have a negative view of mental illness. A limitation of this study was the discrepancy in hours reported for mental health training.

Parker (2009) discussed a correctional officer's essential role in maintaining the safety and security of a facility. The authors conducted a study using a training program that consisted of five two-hour sessions given over 5 consecutive weeks. The first session introduced the correctional officers to personality disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, etc. The second session focused on the biology of mental illness, such as how mental illness impacts the brain. The third session provided an overview of the treatment of mental illness and discussed psychological treatment. The fourth session focused on interacting with individuals with mental illness. The final session focused on a summary of all the previous sessions. The results yielded a decrease 9 months after each training incident in the special housing unit. The author proceeded to mention the various challenges associated with maintaining the safety and security of the facility, such as stressors from working long hours, risk of violence, and low wages. These stressors contribute to the management of working with an individual with a mental illness, which may lead to difficulties in balancing the prison system.

Similarly, Keeler (2017) conducted a study on federal correctional officers and licensed psychologists, focusing on five personality traits to see if there were any differences in their traits and how they perceive mental health illness in general, mentally

ill inmates, and each other. The study had 97 federal correctional officers and 45 licensed psychologists. Federal correctional officers viewed mental illness in general and mentally ill inmates more negatively than licensed psychologists. A factor to consider was the perception of the two groups participating in this study; the federal correctional officers had a negative stigma of mentally ill individuals without knowing or understanding any underlying malingering behavior that can be connected to a mental health issue. Federal correctional officers have a more negative perceived notion of individuals with mental illness compared to psychologists. The licensed psychologist and federal correctional officers perceived one another in a negative light. The licensed psychologist scored higher in compassion than federal correctional officers.

Keeler (2017) mentioned how correctional officers and psychologists must work together in order to communicate and help reduce recidivism rates for mentally ill inmates. This notion of working together is important because licensed psychologists are not solely responsible for recidivism and providing treatment, but also members of the criminal justice system. The experiences of individuals in the criminal justice system provide us with useful knowledge of individuals who are mentally ill and have ASP traits. Despite the prison setting having a foundation based on punishment, the mental health system has a foundation based on rehabilitation.

Exhaustion Among Probation Officers. Freestone et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review of the impact on staff who worked with offenders with personality disorder. The authors detailed how such offenders are generally considered difficult to manage and have a negative impact on staff working with them. Staff competency and

the investment put forth in staff training are associated with a reduction in staff turnover, improved service, and treatment outcomes. Staff mentioned burnout, attitudes and experiences, countertransference, perceived risk of violence, stress, and job satisfaction. The themes were usually used in a negative context, on how individuals with personality disorder are difficult to manage, and there is burnout, stress, etc. The authors mentioned the lack of research conducted using cohort groups or trials, but rather, these studies were descriptive only.

In a similar study, Kurtz and Turner (2007) interviewed 13 staff members who work in a forensic mental health unit, specifically in the personality disorder unit. The staff members reported feeling both physically and psychologically "cut off " from society and other staff members who did not work in that unit. Seasoned practitioners reported feeling burned out, drained, or overwhelmed. Staff members reported feeling physically and psychologically "cut off," burned out, drained, or overwhelmed. The feeling of being "cut off," burned out, drained, etc., can lead to issues with training due to being overwhelmed and not having the motivation to do so. Individuals who work in the criminal justice system may display difficulties managing individuals with mental health issues due to feeling burned out or overwhelmed. The feeling of being burned out or overwhelmed can stem from a lack of training, resources, and a lack of connection with service providers.

Feeling overwhelmed can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout among probation officers. Gayman et al. (2018) conducted a study on the impact of supervising individuals with mental health needs on the well-being of probation officers. The authors

used statewide survey data from 798 parole/probation officers to determine the link between the number of individuals on an officer's caseload and an increased risk for poor mental health for the parole/probation officers. The results yielded that parole/probation officers with more individuals on their caseload reported higher levels of depressive symptoms, and these symptoms were explained by emotional exhaustion.

International Studies

The focus of the research study was within the United States. Still, it is essential to compare probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have a mental health illness with other countries. In the United Kingdom, ASPD is associated with significant social and health burdens, under researched mental disorders, and cost-effective treatment methods (Fonagy et al., 2020). Many studies conducted in the UK have reported personality disorders being overrepresented in the offending population and the criminal justice system. There is a prevalence of ASPD in 0.6% of the UK general population, although it may be underdiagnosed in the community. Among the UK prison population, just under two-thirds of male remand prisoners, half of male sentenced prisoners, and one-third of female prisoners meet diagnostic criteria for ASPD, and nearly half of those on probation have a personality disorder.

Specifically, in England, in March 2023, 222,000 people were serving a probation order in 35 probation trusts (Brooker & Ramsbotham, 2014). Prisons in England hold 85,000 people and retain about 75% of the overall budget. Probation services receive about 25% of the budget but strive to rehabilitate three times more offenders. There is a limit in funding that can be used for training, mental health resources, and caseload

management. Mental health concerns have become a bigger concern in England, especially regarding probation and the resources available.

Fonagy et al. (2020) discussed how ASPD is an under researched mental disorder that requires clinically effective and cost-effective treatment. There has been research conducted on antisocial behaviors, but it has not looked at personality disorder diagnosis. There is limited research on the symptoms of ASP. The limited research contributes to higher recidivism rates, difficulty managing these individuals, and more training. Oftentimes, ASPD is associated with significant health and social burden. The authors mentioned the importance of targeting the spectrum of symptoms and behaviors associated with ASPD in order to improve their mental health while reducing social burden. Individuals with ASPD have a huge impact on society; they not only impact the community members but also impact the criminal justice system. Individuals with ASPD impacting the criminal justice system have led to an increased use of health care facilities.

Fonagy et al. (2020) conducted a study to gather information on the implementation of mentalization for offending adult men. The results yielded that evaluating these individuals for mental health concerns and supplementing mentalization-based therapy with probation was more effective. The authors mention two areas that were limitations to their research study: lack of research and lack of large-scale trials conducted on this topic.

There are similarities between the United States and the United Kingdom when it comes to probation officers and individuals with ASPD and related traits. Some of the

similarities are that these two countries have recognized a lack of research being conducted on this population, the need for treatment, and the importance of training (Fonagy et al., 2020). Providing probation officers with proper training can help identify and manage individuals who are presenting with a mental health issue (Eno Louden et al., 2012). Minoudis et al. (2012) discussed the importance of identifying personality problems in offenders in order to help them isolate those who are likely to reoffend and fail in the community and treatment programs. These authors' results yielded that those with personality disorders, about one-third, dropped out of the study.

Recidivism

Risk assessments and risk management strategies used by probation officers can lead to higher rates of recidivism. Eno Louden and Skeem (2013) conducted a study where 234 probation officers were provided a risk assessment and risk management decision on a vignette portraying an individual on probation with a mental disorder. A risk assessment is provided to individuals who are in the criminal justice system in order to assess the risk of re-offense (Eno & Skeem, 2013). The authors mentioned how officers may mistakenly believe that mental disorder is a “robust” risk factor and rate offenders with mental disorders as high-risk. Even if the agency used a structured risk assessment to estimate the offender's risk, the officer may ignore ratings that disagree with the perceptions of the offender’s risk. This becomes evident when a probation officer shares the same views as the public that individuals with mental health disorders are highly likely to be violent. These officers may take an offender who scores low risk, override that score, and assign a high-risk rating to that offender (Eno & Skeem, 2013).

An individual who is on probation will be assigned to an officer's caseload; this officer may differ from the officer who completes the presentence report (Eno & Skeem, 2013). The role of the probation officer is to supervise the individuals assigned to their caseload and help these individuals reintegrate into the community (insert citation). The probation officer, who supervises the individuals, can impact the individual on probation by recommending that the offender be assigned to a high surveillance caseload. Placing an individual in high-level surveillance can lead to a higher likelihood of infractions being discovered, thus resulting in the offender not meeting the requirements of probation. While on probation, an individual can return to prison if they commit another crime or if it is based on a technical violation.

A technical violation is when the rules of community supervision are not being followed or a disregard for the rules (Eno & Skeem, 2013). A 6-month review yielded that individuals with a mental disorder would return due to a technical violation and not for committing another crime. A probation officer reviews the risk factors that are correlated to technical violations. The authors mentioned antisocial cognitions and ASP patterns as making these individuals "riskier" and, thus, not assisting treatment. Individuals with mental health disorders have additional conditions that are attached to their community supervision, such as mandated treatment. An individual who is on probation may be assigned to receive mental health treatment, and failure to do so will be considered a technical violation. Skeem et al.'s (2009) results yielded that probationers with a mental health disorder who were mandated to receive treatment for mental health did not reduce criminal justice outcomes. The probationers who received mental health

treatment did not refrain from committing acts that led to their arrests or having their probation revoked. Even though the officers endorsed the requirement of treatment, mandating these individuals was deemed ineffective at reducing treatment.

Eno and Skeem (2013) discussed the level of supervision an individual with a mental health disorder may be assigned and the impact that comes with the assigned security level. The authors noticed a trend in the level of security assigned; it was noted that individuals with a mental health disorder were assigned a caseload deemed "high-level security." The individuals with a mental health disorder who were assigned to a high-security level caseload were placed under increased surveillance by the probation officer. The probation officer would pay more attention to the individuals on their caseload who were deemed high-level security, allowing them to notice infractions that they would not normally notice. The probation officer's constant supervision of these individuals left minimal to no room for error from the individuals on probation. A technical violation would be noticed and could impact an individual who is labeled as a high-security level.

As discussed, technical violations may cause an individual to go back to prison due to being placed on high-level surveillance (Eno & Skeem, 2013). The probation officer makes the decision on how to deal with a technical violation and whether to send the individual back to prison. The probation officer directly influences the rate of incarceration for probationers with mental disorders by how they respond to technical violations. The authors discuss the difference between a new offense and a technical violation. A new offense can be detected by other agencies, such as police or community

corrections. Probation officers are given discretion on how to handle technical violations, and some agencies have specific policies to guide officers' interactions with probationers with mental disorders.

A probation officer's discretion is not only for technical infractions and being sent back to prison, but they also have discretion when it comes to treatment. A probation officer's perception or intention can be a positive one, but this can also lead to unnecessary incarceration. Lynch (2000) discovered that officers were often sending individuals with mental disorders back to prison when there was an urgent need for mental health treatment, as the most expedient way to obtain treatment. The officers were trying to seek the quickest form of treatment for individuals with mental health disorders and were using their discretion to send them back to prison. Sending an individual with a mental health disorder back to prison in order to receive treatment can cause recidivism rates to go up and not be reflected accurately. Probation officers' decision to send the individual back to prison due to an urgent need for mental health treatment does not mean the individual has reoffended or violated terms of probation, but rather the need for treatment and lack of resources.

Supervision

Van Deinse et al. (2018) conducted a study to understand the probation officers' perceptions of supervising probationers with mental illness. The probation officers reported that individuals with mental health issues are difficult to supervise because of the lack of mental and substance use resources, limited social support, and lack of

employment opportunities for this population. The authors detailed how individuals with mental illness are supervised using a general supervision model.

Van Deinse et al. (2018) used a general supervision model that considers different factors that can impact the supervision provided to probationers with mental health. The authors go into detail discussing the difference between a rural and an urban area. It is important to note the difference between a rural and an urban area because it can dramatically impact the way the probation officer supervises the individual due to a lack of resources. A probation officer who lives in a rural area will differ from a probation officer who lives in an urban area due to environmental factors. A rural area, one that is outside the city, tends to have a smaller population, and typically, a probation officer may know the individual outside of the criminal justice system. An urban area, one that is inside the city, tends to have a larger population and can be a factor, as the probation officer does not know the individual outside the criminal justice system.

In a rural area, a lack of training and a lack of employment opportunities were a common theme that probation officers mentioned when discussing the difficulty of supervising individuals with mental health concerns (Van Deinse et al., 2018). The lack of training amongst the probation officers can be connected to low income and low levels of education in rural areas. The lack of transportation was another concern for individuals in rural areas due to not being able to get service providers to access the area. Probation officers work with outside service providers to refer individuals with mental health issues for treatment (Van Deinse et al., 2022). The lack of training, low income, and low levels

of education are just some of the factors that make it difficult for probation officers to supervise individuals with mental health concerns.

Probation Officers' Need for Mental Health Training

Various studies have reported a need for mental health training for probation officers who are working with individuals with mental health concerns. The lack of training for these individuals can impact recidivism, negative stigma, and treatment (Tomar et al., 2017). These authors conducted a study to understand how mental health treatment impacts the negative stigma on mental health. The results yielded a difference between male and female probation officers. Female probation officers were more likely to report a less negative view of mental illness than compared to their male counterparts. Overall, male and female probation officers reported a lower negative view of mental illness after receiving training on mental health.

Epperson et al. (2012) detail the differences between a large caseload and a smaller caseload specializing in mental illness. These authors conducted research on specialty programs with a smaller caseload for individuals with serious mental illness because of concerns for public safety, public health, and public spending. Providing individuals with serious mental illness with treatment resources comes with a high cost, and a lack of treatment causes higher chances of spending more time in prison, thus, causing a higher cost.

Specialized probation units for people with serious mental illness are commonly referred to as "mental health probation." These specialized probation units are typically assigned to probation officers who have mental health training and tend to have smaller

caseloads. Having a smaller caseload and mental health training can help the probation officer link these individuals with treatment services. Probation officers perceive the reduction in caseload, the specialty training, and having specialty caseloads to be "very useful."

Over 100 U.S. probation agencies have implemented a specialty mental health caseload (Eno Louden et al., 2012). The authors yielded results that demonstrated how specialty caseloads are more effective than traditional caseloads. As mentioned above, specialty caseloads are deemed to be more effective because there are fewer individuals assigned to their caseloads, and the probation officer has received training in mental health. The study by Eno Louden et al. (2012) goes further in-depth into what occurs in probation officer-probationer meetings within a specialty mental health caseload. The authors found that specialty officers, those assigned a specialty caseload, more frequently discussed the probationers' general mental health rather than their "criminogenic need," affirmed and supported probationers rather than confronting them, and relied on neutral strategies and positive pressures.

Probation Officer Implementation of Mandated Treatment

Skeem et al. (2003) conducted a study to investigate how probation officers implement mandates for individuals to participate in mental health treatment. The study used individuals from two different groups, traditional and specialty probation agencies. Five focus groups were used with 32 probation officers and 20 probationers to understand how probation officers implement mandates. The results yielded three key findings. First, there were significant differences between probation officers in specialty and traditional

agencies in the nature, range, and timing of strategies applied to monitor and enforce treatment compliance. Traditional officers were limited in their understanding of psychotropic medication, treatment programs, and social service systems.

The relationship between the probation officer and the probationer impacted the probation officer's use of these strategies and was deemed essential to the probationer's outcome (Skeem et al., 2003). If the relationship was characterized as being respectful and personal, they were deemed to be more effective in achieving the desired outcome than using an authoritarian approach. The specialty agencies' focus was on offender rehabilitation, whereas traditional agencies' focus was more exclusively on community safety.

Referrals to Community Services by Probation Officers

The relationship between community public health, accessibility, and mass incarceration is a phenomenon that has not been addressed and understood (Ramezani et al., 2022). Authors Ramezani et al. (2022) identified county-level demographic, socioeconomic, health care accessibility, and criminal legal characteristics that predict jail population across the United States. The results indicated that the work stressors prison officers experienced led to burnout. Prison officers who experienced emotional exhaustion noted a correlation between intra-role conflict and inter-role conflict. Van Deinse et al. (2022) conducted a study on the connection between a probation officer, the service provider networks, and the frequency and nature of contacts with those networks. The probation officers reported a high frequency of contact with service providers. The service providers and the probation officers were more likely to share information if

reciprocated by their counterparts. Increasing the frequency and strengthening the relationship between the probation officer and service providers can increase timely services for adults with mental illnesses who are on probation. A stronger relationship between these two groups can decrease recidivism, reduce harsher punishments, and increase treatment.

Probation officers and offenders defined the role of the probation officer as monitoring mental health, facilitating access, managing engagement in health services, and managing risk (Sirdfield & Owen, 2016). The author discussed certain barriers that a probation officer may encounter that would prevent the probation officers to not be able to fulfill their role. Some of the barriers are a lack of formal referral procedures between probation and health agencies, problems with interagency communication, and gaps in service provision for those with dual diagnosis and personality disorder. This was connected to the probation officer's perception of the circumstances under which a referral would be needed or if they needed to seek out another agency. If the probation officer deemed it important, then a referral procedure would be conducted. If the probation officer did not deem it important, then no referral would be sought, and the individual may not get the treatment they require. Overall, the probation officers' perception plays a major role in assessing and deciding if a referral is necessary.

The Scope of Incarceration in the United States

In 2021, an estimated 5,400,000 people were under the supervision of adult correctional systems in the United States, a decline since 2002. About a decade earlier (2014), there were an estimated 6,800,000 individuals under the supervision of U.S. adult

correctional systems (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Compared to 2002, the number of individuals under correctional status reached a new record of 6,700,000 (Glaze, 2003). Of these 6,700,000 individuals, about 60% of these individuals were supervised in the community by probation officers, thus causing a strain on probation agencies. The rate of individuals on probation or parole fell to a low in 2021 (1,440 per 100,000 adult U.S. residents). The rate of individuals on probation has had a steady decline since 2007 (2,240 per 100,000). J. E. Johnson et al. (2023) estimated that there are about 10,000,000 individuals with mental health problems who interact with the U.S. criminal legal system a year. The interactions these individuals with mental health problems have with the criminal legal system include: calling 911, police, jail detention and sentences, courts, and probation.

Skeem et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study to compare public safety outcomes for traditional probation vs specialty mental health probation. The study was conducted from October 2005 to January 2013 and consisted of 359 probationers with mental illness, and the results yielded a reduction in rearrests but not a significant reduction in violence. At the 2-year mark, an estimated 28.6% of specialty probationers and 51.8% of traditional probationers had been rearrested. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation records, rearrests occurred between the 2- and 5-year mark.

Summary and Conclusions

There has been a multitude of research conducted for individuals who are on probation, who are on probation and have a mental health disorder, who are on probation and have a personality disorder, etc. There was a limitation and a lack of research on

probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. Lad and Walker (2022) conducted research that focused on probation officers' experiences working with individuals who meet diagnostic criteria and have been diagnosed with ASPD. This research differed and focused on the gap in the literature, which was ASP traits. Individuals who display ASP traits and do not meet the criteria are a population who are under researched.

Probation officers are impacted by environmental factors that are their upbringing, their coworkers, the individuals who train them, previous individuals on their caseload, etc. (Oostermeijer et al., 2022). These factors provided insight as to the experiences the probation officers had working with individuals with ASP traits. It is common to have a negative stigma when hearing the term mental health or being assigned an individual with a mental health issue to their caseload. The probation officers can have a negative perception that can influence their discretion (Terpstra & Mulvey, 2022). The probation officers can perform risk assessments, seek referrals for treatment, place individuals with mental health issues on a specialized caseload, and send them back to prison for a technical violation (Eno & Skeem, 2013). Having the discretion to make these decisions can impact recidivism rates and the increase of individuals with a mental health issue reverting to prison.

The purpose of this research was to examine and explore the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits and to gather more knowledge on how the experiences of probation officers play a role in the criminal justice system. A greater understanding was achieved by collecting data directly from probation

officers through the use of semi structured interviews. By speaking to probation officers, the researcher gained an understanding of how the experiences of probation officers play a role in the criminal justice system. This literature review justified the inclusion of the *DSM-5* diagnosis criteria and traits of ASPD.

A common theme among these studies was the lack of funding and training that probation officers receive (Parker, 2009). Another common theme was the probation officer making harsher recommendations when dealing with someone who had a mental health issue (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). The lack of training and resources has led to probation officers feeling burned out, not equipped to deal with these individuals, and not wanting to work with them. Cieslak et al. (2008) discussed how feeling burned out can lead to decreased work ethic, poor interactions with individuals, and withdrawal. These common themes impacted the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits. These experiences also tied into the recommendations made to the judge and how harsh the punishment will be (Edens et al., 2018). Berryessa and Wohlstetter's (2019) study revealed a correlation between the label of psychopathy, harsher recommendations of punishment, and higher recidivism rates. How the label of being a psychopath can impact the views of those who are recommending harsher punishments.

Flaatten et al. (2024) conducted a study on ASPD and therapeutic pessimism, and whether mentalization-based treatment can increase therapeutic optimism. The authors explained that individuals with ASPD are not traditional patients when it comes to treatment due to displaying characteristics of repeated rule-breaking, recklessness,

irresponsibility, impulsiveness, etc. Therapeutic pessimism among health professionals has been caused by confusion about the term ASPD, treatment-rejecting behavior, and insufficient management of negative countertransference.

In Chapter Three, I further examined the methodology that was used during the research study. The role of the researcher, the progress of the participants in the selection, the data analysis plan, credibility, etc., were analyzed and detailed. Chapter three also examined the research design, sampling strategies, and methods in order to ensure validity, trustworthiness, credibility, and to reduce research bias. The importance of using qualitative data collection and analysis, in line with SCT, was also discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine and explore the experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits and to gather more knowledge on how the experiences of probation officers play a role in the criminal justice system. For this study, a qualitative phenomenological method was the best approach to examine the experiences of probation officers who are working with individuals who have ASP traits. Using the phenomenological approach, the data for this study were collected through individual semi structured interviews with the probation officers. The data included the personal perceptions and experiences of each probation officer interviewed. The understanding of any influences on the probation officers' decisions when working with individuals with ASP traits based on their experiences is what was investigated. Probation officers make decisions regularly that impact those they supervise, but the experiences of probation officers working with people with ASP traits are not widely researched. Gaining insight into the impact probation officers experience working with individuals with ASP traits helped enact positive social change by impacting recidivism rates, training, negative stigma, etc.

This chapter includes components of the methodology that are used in the proposed study, including the research design, the reason for using a qualitative study, the role of the researcher, information regarding potential biases, potential issues with biases, and an in-depth review of the study. In Chapter 3, I discussed the sampling strategy, the method used, and any concerns that may arise. The study addressed the research question

and included a description of the methodology used to ask the research question. A final summary of the study methodology was discussed before leading into Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of probation officers working with adults with ASP traits? To answer the question, I used a qualitative research design. According to the APA (2020), an experience is an event that is lived through, as opposed to one that is imagined, that will result in a learned stimulus. This phenomenological study focused on the conscious experiences that involve a phenomenon and the perceptions, emotions, and judgments of those experiencing it. The Giorgi method was used in this phenomenological study. The method focused on the meaning of a phenomenon as it is experienced by a human through the use of themes (Giorgi, 2009). The application of the Giorgi method allowed the participants to express themselves in detail and receive validation about their lived experiences from their perspectives.

This qualitative study filled a gap in the research and addressed a lack of knowledge on the probation officers' experiences when working with individuals with ASP traits. This unknown area of research led to these possible outcomes: (a) this study provided knowledge on how the experiences of the probation officers impact those individuals with ASP traits in the criminal justice system, or (b) that there was no connection between probation officers' experiences working with individuals with ASP traits and the criminal justice system.

Role of the Researcher

In a research study, the researchers are a key instrument, and their background, experience, and demographics can affect the research (Zhang & Lui, 2008). The researcher needs to be able to build rapport with the individuals participating in the study in order to gain the trust of the participants and gather as much information as possible. Fink (2000) divided the role of a qualitative researcher into seven stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. My role as the qualitative researcher was to gather the thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of the study participants.

In this phenomenological study, I explored the impact on recidivism rates through the experiences of the probation officers from their perspective. Researchers must be aware of their biases and be able to set them aside to ensure the study is objective. As an individual who works for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, I find being objective important for this research study. Bracketing is used to allow the researcher to invest completely in the research and understand the participant's beliefs without tainting the study due to the researcher's biases, experiences, or preconceptions (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019). I used bracketing for my research study to ensure that I was objective and was able to separate my preconceptions, biases, place of employment, and experiences from the study.

My role was not only to gather information but to explain to the participants that I must be open and honest about the answers and ensure the participants' confidentiality. Those who were chosen for an interview received a letter via email, information about the interview, an invitation to sign a consent form, and a letter of participation.

Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) stated that research bias occurs when "systematic error is introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others (p. 619)." A research bias is not simplified into a question of whether a bias is present or not. Instead, one must consider to what degree a bias was prevented using a proper study design and implementation. A researcher needs to be aware of potential biases because these biases can affect the validity of the results and could contaminate data, analysis, and publication. I acknowledged any potential biases I had, maintained awareness of these biases, and set them aside to ensure the validity of this study. I kept a record of my thoughts and feelings while being open-minded about the information I was receiving during the interview process to help me separate my biases and experiences from the participants' experiences.

Being transparent in this research study helped prevent any scrutiny during peer review and decrease any foreseeable limitations (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). My professional associations, education, and employment within the criminal justice system were disclosed in this study. I did not possess any personal or professional connections and/or conflicts with the research participants in this study. The participants were recruited within the United States. I did not interview anyone with whom I had a personal or direct professional relationship. I understand the participants are employed within the criminal justice system, and the information they can divulge during the interview process may be limited.

Methodology

Sutton and Austin (2015) discussed how qualitative research can help researchers access the thoughts and feelings of the research participants, which can enable the understanding of the meaning people attribute to their experiences. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences (Neubauer, 2019). The goal of phenomenology is to be able to describe the meaning of the experience both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced. Using a phenomenological approach, the study was qualitative to obtain the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits. A qualitative methodology focuses on experiences and how individuals process experiences (Patton, 2015).

Participant Selection Logic

The population for this study was individuals who are probation officers who have worked or are working with individuals who have ASP traits. Purposive sampling is a method used by the researcher to choose participants based on their characteristics or expertise (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The target number of participants for this study was between 8 and 12; however, the exact number was not known until data saturation was reached. Data saturation is reached when enough data has been collected to draw necessary conclusions, and no additional data will produce value (Guest et al., 2020). The authors discussed the importance of the first five to six interviews, as these interviews will produce the richest data. Also, 80%–92% of all identifiable concepts will be found within the first ten

interviews of a study. Given this information, eight to 12 participants should produce the data set that will be necessary to analyze the themes from the data collected.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

I proposed the inclusion criteria for participation to be the following: be at least 18 years of age, live within the United States, be a probation officer, and have experience actively working with individuals who display ASP traits and are not in their probationary period of employment. Participants were excluded from this study if they had not completed their probationary year as a probation officer, were not at least 18 years of age, or had not actively worked with an individual who displays ASP traits. Probation officers currently working with individuals with ASP traits who are on pretrial were also excluded to reduce any conflict of interest.

Procedures for Pilot Study

The interview guide was piloted to verify accuracy and allowed the pilot participant to alter or suggest any changes to the interview questions. The interview questions were open-ended to understand the lived experiences of probation officers who have worked with individuals with ASP traits. After the pilot study was completed, it was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In order to recruit participants for this study, approval must be obtained from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval number for study is 03-10-25-1060062. Prospective participants received a welcome email and were invited to participate in a brief interview via Zoom, telephone, or email to ensure they were eligible

to participate. After the individual was determined to be eligible, a secondary email was sent, including a welcome letter detailing the expectations of the participant, rules of engagement, confidentiality, and consent forms. The purpose of using email for communication was to allow for electronic tracking, consistency, and clear communication. The participant was expected to respond to the follow-up email by stating they consented to participate in the study.

The snowball method is used to reach unknown populations that may not have otherwise been discovered unless a referral was noted (T. P. Johnson, 2014). The snowball method relies on referrals from initial participants who may meet the requirements to participate, and is cost-effective because it is a referral. This sampling style provided more referrals and potential participants, but has the limitation of issues with confidentiality. Issues of confidentiality can arise due to the nature of the relationship between the active participant and the referral.

I created a welcome packet using the IRB online Manual forms. The packet included a recruitment flyer and informed consent forms that detailed the intent of the study, confidentiality for the participant's responses, the rights the participants have, the ability to stop the interview at any time, and my contact information. I went over the guidelines that were set in place to ensure anonymity. I went over the purpose of the IRB at Walden University to make sure that the study is consistent with ethical procedures.

Instrumentation

I used semi structured interviews, where I asked open-ended questions that allowed the participant to provide their opinions without any prejudice or interference in

their responses. At the beginning of each interview, I asked basic background questions, such as demographics, in order to establish rapport. I followed up with open-ended questions and reconfirmed that the participant meets eligibility for this study. I then reiterate that the participant's participation is completely voluntary, and confidentiality will be maintained. A request was made for verbal acknowledgment for allowing me to record the interview. After the interview was completed, I utilized Otter.ai (https://otter.ai/) to transcribe the interview for analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

For the data collection, the participants were debriefed on the study's goals, purposes, and outcomes. Numbers were assigned to maintain confidentiality. I explained to each participant how important this study is for positive social change purposes, as it can help decrease harsher punishments/recidivism rates, increase resources, and reduce feelings of burnout. I took handwritten notes to document the participants' answers, and a digital recorder was used to record the interview. Katz-Buonincontro (2022) noted that data analysis focuses on developing and clustering themes that are discovered during the coding stages.

I used Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of probation officers who are working with individuals who have ASP traits. Giorgi (2012) facilitates a data analysis using a step-by-step method that formulates meaning units and themes. The first step is to use reduction and bracketing of the information provided by the participants. The second step is to read the transcripts, review handwritten notes, listen to the audio recording of the interview, and then review

the transcript again. The third step is to view and maintain the data as a whole with intertwining meaning units. The fourth step is to transfer the meaning units into psychological statements while repeating the first three steps for each participant's response to each interview question. The fifth step involves taking the meaning units and clustering them into identifiable themes. The final step transfers the meaning units, categories, and themes to develop a narrative of the rich data garnered through the explored lived experiences of probation officers who have worked with individuals who have ASP traits.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This section was organized into the following components: trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability, and member checking.

Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) discussed four provisions that aid the qualitative researcher in establishing trustworthiness: (a) credibility and validity, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability to increase this study's trustworthiness. These four provisions help the qualitative researcher establish trustworthiness in the research results.

Trustworthiness is one of the shared realities where the readers and writers may find a commonality in their constructive processes (Stahl & King, 2020). Once the reader interprets the work that is written, they will have a sense of confidence in what the researcher has reported. Being able to build trust and credibility is important in qualitative research. I explained and established all biases and experiences related to my relationship with probation officers who are working with individuals who have ASP

traits. The use of reflexivity allowed me, the researcher, to establish credibility. For credibility, each participant was emailed a copy of their transcript to check for accuracy. Saturation was done by reaching out to all the probation officers I was able to access through online databases.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to take the results of a qualitative study and apply them to other settings or contexts with different participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Transferability depends on the combination of the common features of the phenomenon and the variable setting (Rodon & Sesa, 2008). I addressed the issue of transferability through a comprehensive sample of participants and a thorough analysis of the responses provided. I ensured transferability by using snowball sampling and providing a detailed description of the context.

Confirmability

Confirmability establishes that the results of a study are based on the participants and not based on a bias that may be motivated by the researcher's interest or motive (Amankwaa, 2016). Some researchers use audit trails that will establish confirmability in qualitative research. An audit trail is when an additional party reviews the researcher's research decisions, analytical processes, and methodological decisions (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004).

Credibility

Demonstrating that the research has credibility is an important factor in establishing trustworthiness in the research results (Shenton, 2004). Validity and

reliability in research and its results are important elements to provide evidence of the quality of research (Hayashi et al., 2019). Internal validity is a key criterion that is used to ensure that the study measures what it is intended to measure, thus establishing credibility. The researcher must be transparent about the process that is being used to interpret the data collected and the rationale for the process, and be comfortable with allowing verification of the findings (Wood et al., 2020). Credibility was checked through member checking. The participants will be emailed a copy of their transcript to review for accuracy. Any feedback provided will be discussed via telephone or email.

Dependability

Dependability is often used to address an issue of reliability. Shenton (2004) discussed that if one were to repeat the work, in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, similar results would be obtained. The author referred to the research study as a prototype where a researcher can repeat the work. The research process should be as detailed as possible, not for the purpose of gaining the same results but rather to understand the process in detail. Different strategies are used to determine dependability, such as triangulation, audit trails, and peer examination (Bitsch, 2005). I established dependability by using audit trails and documentation for cross-checking notes, interviews, recordings, and transcripts. An audit trail is completed by keeping track of all the documentation relevant to the research study.

Member Checking

Member checking ensures the participants' accurate information is being transferred into the data (Birt et al., 2016). I completed the process of member checking

and sent the individuals who participated in the research study transcripts of the completed transcripts so they could ensure accuracy. The process of member checking was by email; if any changes were communicated, the changes were made and there was a follow-up with the individual participant as to the changes made.

Ethical Procedures

I conducted this study in accordance with Walden University's IRB and federal regulations in the United States to ensure the protection of the individuals participating in the research study. The IRB approval number for this research study is 03-10-25-1060062. Data collection began after receiving approval from Walden's IRB. This research study deals with a sensitive topic, and I needed to ensure confidentiality among each of the participants. The participants who were chosen for this research study were required to provide consent, which was created by Walden University's IRB. Maintaining the participants' confidentiality was one of the main priorities because they are officials who work for the court of law.

Treatment of Participants

In agreement with the IRB guidelines, the participants were provided with a welcome packet that included the details of the study, an informed consent agreement form, information about confidentiality, procedures, benefits/incentives, potential risks, and methods of recording. The more transparent the researcher is with the participant, the more likely the participant is to make better and more informed decisions regarding their participation in the study (Xu et al., 2020). I recruited the participants through an email that included the name of the researcher, dissertation title, and purpose of the research

study. The participants were provided a telephone number and an email address as a point of contact.

To maintain anonymity, I assigned each participant an alphanumeric code that corresponded to their interview. I did not use the name, city where they live, or other demographics during the interview to ensure confidentiality. Only the audio from participant interviews was recorded to maintain confidentiality and avoid exposing the participant's identity. The participants were also informed about their right to withdraw consent at any time and remove themselves from the study, with or without reason. The interview transcripts are being kept in a secure area that requires a lock, and the information will be stored for at least 5 years and then properly destroyed and disposed of. The data that were transcribed are password-protected on all devices used and will be disposed of and destroyed according to guidelines.

Threats to Validity

Hayashi et al. (2019) noted five different types of validity: descriptive, interpretive, evaluative, generalization, and theoretical. Descriptive validity ensures that the researcher does not "embellish or distort the information (Hayashi et al., 2019, p. 100). Interpretive validity encompasses the processes, participant values, and hidden concepts, beliefs, or intentions of the participant (Hayashi et al., 2019). Hayashi et al. (2019) described theoretical validity as "how much a theoretical explanation is developed through research analysis" (p. 100) and the consistency of the data. Generalization validity is the ability to extend the study results to other populations or specific situations (Hayashi et al., 2019). Hayashi et al. (2019) stated that valuation validity is the ability to

critically examine one's research results as a way of learning and expanding their understanding.

In a qualitative study, the data-gathering instrument is usually the researcher (Brink, 1993). Therefore, the question of researcher bias and the researcher's competency may influence the trustworthiness of the study. Even the presence of the researcher can affect the validity of the data provided to the participants. The researcher's biases can taint how the phenomenon or data is based on one's belief system. The fried model serves as an assessment or a reflection tool for researchers to become aware of their own behaviors, feelings, and responses in relation to the behaviors and experiences of the participants.

In order to minimize threats to validity, I sent the interview instrument and feedback from the participants to my committee, as well as any changes made. If a participant, at any time, requests not to continue with the interview process, I would have allowed them to discontinue the process and send them a thank-you card for attempting to participate in the research study. I believe that the risks involved in the research study were minimal. If the participant developed any undue stress from participating in the study, I would have referred them to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline toll-free telephone number.

Summary

This chapter included an outline of the study plan for recruiting participants, data collection, and data analysis, as well as the trustworthiness of the research. I also addressed ethical procedures for participating in and conducting this phenomenological

study, which included informed consent, confidentiality procedures, disposal of interviews, and numerical coding to preserve anonymity. Further procedures were discussed, including interview recording transcription, coding, and data analysis to answer the research question. Chapter 4 included discussions of study results, participant demographics, data collection and analysis, and emerging themes and subthemes. Chapter 5 included suggestions for future research and implications.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the probation officer's experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits by exploring how their experiences impact the criminal justice system. I sought to understand from probation officers how their experiences working with individuals with ASP traits impacted their perceptions, feelings of burnout, and recommendations to the judge.

Chapter 1 includes a discussion of the importance of this study to the criminal justice system. I sought to identify how probation officers impact those individuals who do not meet criteria for ASPD but rather display traits, through their experiences working with this population. A thorough, comprehensive review of the literature in Chapter 2 provided the foundation for understanding the complexity of the criminal justice system and the role probation officers play.

I used a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits. I used Giorgi's phenomenological method to conduct this qualitative study by collecting data using semi structured interviews to garner detailed and complete descriptions from participant narratives. I conducted nine semi structured phone call interviews to develop six emergent themes and one subtheme.

The research question for this study was, What are the experiences of probation officers working with adults with ASP traits? Participants' shared experiences will be identified by probing and reflecting on in-depth interviews and the use of follow-up

questions to explore further connections between the participants' responses. In this chapter, I included the results of this phenomenological qualitative study. The chapter begins with a description of the research setting and discusses the participants' demographics. I then describe the data analysis process that was previously mentioned in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary. A comprehensive analysis of themes will be provided, followed by a description of the research.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study after receiving approval from the Walden University IRB. The pilot study was conducted in order to test that the interview questions had proper flow and that appropriate interviewing techniques were used. I was unable to use any participants from the research, so I asked a colleague to complete the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted over the phone, in a quiet setting, and confidentiality was maintained. I asked 10 questions with follow-up questions and took notes as the interview proceeded. After the interview was completed, the transcript was transcribed and manually reviewed for accuracy. During the pilot study, I was able to gain techniques on how to ask open-ended questions, take notes, and probe the participant for more information.

Setting

For this research study, it was important to provide a confidential environment that allowed the participants to be open and honest during the interview process. The interview format used was telephone interviews. I completed the interviews with a total

of nine participants. Each participant was given instructions to remain in a confidential setting for the duration of the interview and to maintain confidentiality. There was no use of organizational conditions that could influence the participants or the research study results.

Demographics

Lived experiences allow for an in-depth examination of the nature of the phenomenon through a participant's experiences (Guest et al., 2020). The participant pool was generated using specific criteria in order to determine eligibility to participate in the study. Probation officers who were 18 years old, resided in the United States, completed their probationary years, and had actively worked with an individual who had ASP traits were chosen.

To facilitate the initial contact, I distributed an electronic recruitment flyer via Facebook, Reddit, and LinkedIn, with nine potential participants responding. I reached data saturation after nine participants. All participants provided acknowledgment of meeting inclusion criteria, and all were assigned an alphanumeric code for confidentiality purposes. Table 1 provides participant demographic data.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant alphanumeric code	Gender	State or federal level
P1	Female	State
P2	Female	State
P3	Female	State
P4	Female	Federal
P5	Male	State
P6	Female	State

P7	Male	Federal
P8	Female	State
P9	Male	Federal

Data Collection

Initial contact with participants was done through email after potential respondents expressed their interest in participating. I included the consent form, confidentiality procedures, time commitments, and the data collection procedure in emails that were sent. Participants also had the consent form read to them and were asked to provide a response when asked, “Do you agree to be interviewed for this study?” The data collection process began on March 10, 2025, after receiving Walden’s IRB endorsement (no. 03-10-25-1060062). I posted flyers on approved social media platforms and emailed contacts who knew potential participants who met the inclusion criteria.

The use of semi structured interviews provided the primary data collection method for this study. I followed the 35–45-min interview protocol to obtain participant narratives of their lived experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were informed that there would be an audio recording of the interview. I reminded them that the interview was confidential and that their names would not be provided for the research study. An alphanumeric identifier would be provided to protect their identity.

I used a digital audio recorder to capture the participants' responses during the interviews. Each participant was given 30–60 min for their interview, and all the participants were able to stay within the given time frame. I used Otter.ai (https://otter.ai/) to transcribe the interviews. Once each interview was transcribed, I reviewed the

interview for accuracy and used member checking to finalize it by having each participant review. While conducting the interviews, there were no irregularities in the data collection process.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I used Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits. Giorgi's method focuses on the meaning of a phenomenon as it is experienced by a human through the use of themes. A use of meaning units and categories to describe the participant's responses to semi structured questions from the interview guide.

The first step is to use reduction and bracketing of the information provided by the participants. The second step is to read the transcripts, review handwritten notes, listen to the audio recording of the interview, and then review the transcript again. For this step, I used otter.ai to help me transcribe the participants' responses and then manually verified the information for accuracy. The third step is to view and maintain the data as a whole with intertwining meaning units. There is a wide range of coding software available, but the decision was made to hand-code the data and to develop a system of color-coding to identify meaning units. The fourth step is to transfer the meaning units into psychological statements while repeating the first three steps for each participant's response to each interview question. The fifth step involves taking the meaning units and clustering them into identifiable themes. The final step transfers the meaning units, categories, and themes to develop a narrative of the rich data garnered

through the explored lived experiences of probation officers who have worked with individuals who have ASP traits.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to take the results of a qualitative study and apply them to other settings or contexts with different participants (Korstjens & Morser, 2018). Transferability depends on the combination of the common features of the phenomenon and the variable setting (Rodon & Sesa, 2008). To ensure transferability, I implemented the snowball sampling during the data collection process. I also utilized verbatim quotes from the participants to help inform and resonate with the readers.

Credibility

Demonstrating that the research has credibility is an important factor in establishing trustworthiness in the research results (Shenton, 2004). Validity and reliability in research and its results are important elements to provide evidence of the quality of research (Hayashi et al., 2019). Through the process of member checking, the participants were provided with the opportunity to make any relevant changes to the transcript. All the participants reported that the transcripts provided accurately reflected what was said during the interview process. The information provided to the participants was clear and aligned with the study's phenomenon.

Dependability

Dependability is often used to address the issue of reliability. Shenton (2004) discussed that if one were to repeat the work, in the same context, with the same methods

and the same participants, similar results would be obtained. The research process should be as detailed as possible, not for the purpose of gaining the same results but rather to understand the process in detail. The researcher of this study referenced-checked the recorded interviews, transcripts, and handwritten notes. I ensured the participants provided sufficient information that was relevant to the research topic and phenomenon. A research pilot study was completed to ensure that the interview questions asked were relevant to the research study.

Conformability

Confirmability establishes that the results of a study are based on the participants and not based on a bias that may be motivated by the researcher's interest or motive (Amankwaa, 2016). To ensure confirmability, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process. Throughout the process, I remained objective by keeping a journal and continuously confirming the findings. The journal allowed me to set aside any biases I may have and to allow the process to be organic without any input of opinion. The participants were provided with detailed procedures and ample time to illustrate their lived experiences with working with individuals who have ASP traits. I did not use any leading questions, and I allowed the participants to respond freely. I remained objective by actively listening and applying the same procedure during each interview.

Results

To analyze the data and organize the results, I reviewed transcripts, handwritten notes, and journal notes that included observations of participants' tone, speech patterns, and perceived emotional responses. The nine participants were asked 10 questions with

follow-up questions, which produced over 100 meaning units from which six themes and one subtheme arose. The interview and follow-up questions probed the participants to describe their lived experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. The interview questions initially focused on the participants' desire to become a probation officer, their experience, whether a caseload was assigned, and whether there was any difficulty managing their caseload. The interview questions then shifted to hone in on the participant's experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. Lastly, the interview questions captured how participants' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits differ and what training has been provided.

Emergent Theme 1

The research question correlates with the meaning units and Emergent Theme 1, which is the reason why participants chose to become a probation officer. The average response was wanting to help others and reentry, with the outliers being personal background and the balance of roles between law enforcement and social change. Each participant had their own reason for becoming a probation officer. Some joined due to the balance of roles (law enforcement and social change) and personal background and job flexibility, while most reported joining because of helping others and reentry. Participants mentioned becoming a probation officer because of wanting to help others and the reentry. P4 stated,

> I like the idea of helping people. When I originally started, I was in juvenile probation. And I really enjoyed working with the kids, working with families, just trying to, you know, make changes early on in someone's life, to hope that they

> have a better life, you know, in the future, depending on, like, you know, what path they already started going down.

Similarly, P7 reported, “I became a probation officer to make a difference, and help those individual who have come into the criminal justice system.” P3 had a similar response:

> I was more better off working with reentry and how they're just outside of prison. So I decided to go the probationary route to help people that are already within the community to reenter back into society a little better.

Theme 1 is essential as it shows the reason why the participants chose to become probation officers. The majority of the participants chose to become a probation officer due to a sense of helping others and to promote reentry. There were two outliers worth mentioning, first, some of the participants became probation officers because of the balance between the need to provide social change and law enforcement. The second outlier was the participant deciding to become a probation officer due to a job opportunity and personal background. The participant mentioned a background in criminal justice as the motivation for applying. Overall, the majority of participants were motivated to become probation officers to help others and facilitate reentry.

Emergent Theme 2

Theme 2 aligns with the research question and describes participants’ reports of recommendations made to the judge and the participants' decision-making. Theme 2 focuses on how recommendations are made to the judge. The majority of participants mentioned individualized considerations are used to make recommendations to the judge, while some said it was guidelines/law as well as their professional judgment (see Table

2). The majority of participants looked into individualized considerations such as the violation of probation, the criminal history, and other environmental factors.

Table 2

Meaning Units and Emergent Theme 2/Subtheme

Meaning unit	Theme/subtheme
Recommendations based on judgment, environment, type of violation, and number of offenses	Recommendation to the judge and decision-making based on individualized considerations (theme)
Recommendations based on factors and guidelines/law	Balancing legal and professional judgment (subtheme)

Many participants reported that they made recommendations based on individualized considerations. P2 stated,

> It would be based upon the individuals that their crime, the circumstances and nature of the crime, their compliance with the conditions of supervision, and their non compliance, and based upon whatever the violation would have been at that time. Employment history, compliance with the special conditions of supervision, their living situation.

P3 reported,

> Based off the history of the offender at the time and based off the level of violation that they like committed. The individual person, the original crime, the new violation that they committed, and any prior violations that they committed as well.

P4 reported,

> I take into consideration the crime victim input, the offender's attitude at the time that I meet with them, and then I also take a look into their own history, like their own family, background schooling and all that stuff, and put it all together to come up with a recommendation.

P5 stated,

> I consider a little bit of everything in their life…between their employment, family, just their personal history, regarding their experiences, different traumas they've been through. And then also, I consider whatever resources we have available in our community.

Subtheme

A few of the participants reported that they made recommendations to the judge based on professional judgment and guidelines/laws. The participants' professional judgment was based on their individualized considerations of what they deemed important to consider. The participants mentioned looking at statutes, laws, and state guidelines. P7 professed,

> We make recommendations to the judge based upon the laws and my experience. Recognition because someone can have a very good heart, and it was just put in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the type of atmosphere, age, and environment.

P9 reported,

> Um, we go off different criteria's regarding their history, their current status, and civilization, that sort of thing. And also, we go by statute and procedures, and

> federal criminal guidelines. specifically, criminal history, any violations, the nature of the new violation, the recommended sentence, based on our guidelines, and obviously, our supervisors input.

Theme 2 is essential as it shows how the probation officers make recommendations to the judge. The majority of the participants make recommendations to the judge based on individualized considerations. The individualized considerations range from criminal history, family, new violation, number of offenses, victim remorse, and other environmental factors. The theme is essential to understanding how the lived experiences of the probation officer impact how they make recommendations to the judge. Specifically, how the individualized considerations of the probation officer can impact individuals who have ASP traits. The subtheme that emerged showed that participants make recommendations to the judge based on guidelines/law and several other factors, such as criminal history, employment, and family. The participants would use guidelines/laws and their personal judgment to make the recommendations to the judge.

Emergent Theme 3

The majority of the participants described attending mandatory annual training. The training ranged from 8 to 20 hr and varied in the topic of mental health they would receive. This theme is important for the research question because it provides insight into the amount of training being received. Despite two participants mentioning not receiving training due to having specialized officers who deal with mental health cases the common

consensus was that training was received. Mandatory annual training for probation officers is Theme 3. The meaning unit is annual training ranging from 8 to 40 hr.

Most participants reported having to attend a mandatory annual training ranging from 8 to 40 hr. P2 stated, “There's always 40 hr of service training each year. And anything outside of that, the mental health first aid, I did different, different mental health classes, behavioral interviewing techniques, things of that nature.” P3 reported, “Um, I originally, I went to a academy that was 2 months long originally, and then we have a separate mental health training that you go to every year for 8 hr.”

P5 stated,

> I went through my mandated, state mandated program, and then each year, annually, we're required to go through 20 hr. My personal goal I set for myself, is at least 5 training hr a year out of the 20, just so I could keep myself current and on such issues.

Theme 3 is important as it provides insight into the training that is provided to probation officers. The training is provided yearly and is mandatory. The majority of participants reported having to attend annual training that ranges from 8 to 40 hr. One of the participants mentioned training being sporadic and attending training because of a requirement for their licensure. Two participants mentioned they do not need to attend training when it comes to working with individuals who have ASP traits because they have certified specialized officers who work with the mental health caseload. The type of training the participants received varied, and the topic was not consistent. Overall, training was not consistent within the State and Federal probation system.

Emergent Theme 4

The research question is associated with Emergent Theme 4: Biases and misconceptions of mental health and ASP traits (see Table 3). The majority of the participants stated there was a bias or misconception when hearing the words mental health illness or ASP traits. A few of the biases mentioned by the participants, in their language, were “crazy,” “not credible,” and “being manipulative.”

Table 3

Meaning Units and Emergent Theme 4

Meaning unit	Theme 4
Labels of individuals being crazy Lack of credibility Individuals being manipulative	Biases and misconceptions of mental health and antisocial personality traits

Each participant reported a bias or misconception when hearing the words mental health illness and ASP traits. P9 detailed his experience as follows:

> Yeah, I think you can, to a certain extent, we're definitely trained to be a little bit more hyper aware when we're dealing with somebody who may have displays of mental health issues as a safety concern. So, yeah, I think, I think it would. But it’s the nature of the job and it does have an effect on our on our perception of the person, or biases.

P1 noted,

> Yeah, I do think it can cause bias. Serious mental illness. Oftentimes people think of people that are like not able to function on their own, that they need assistance, that they need to be institutionalized. They're often seen as a more difficult. I

> think antisocial has a lot of different bias than serious mental illness, because antisocial is more of, okay, you're going to get the really, really resistant offenders, and a lot of times they're extremely intelligent, where serious mental illness, they have a lot of chemical barriers that they're trying to overcome. They need medication. Whereas antisocial, there's no medication that's going to cure that. It's personality disorder.

P2 noted,

> Yes, because of the stigma, because they've been labeled, and if they've been labeled antisocial or that they have a mental health issue, it's, it's mental which means that they don't feel as though they can, they can comply that if they might need to be medicated in order to get them to a compliance level to complete, to successfully complete probation. So yes, it will be a stigma once you hear mental health.

Theme 4 is essential to the research question because it is asking the probation officers if hearing the words mental health illness and ASP traits can cause a bias. All the participants responded that hearing the words mental health illness and ASP traits would cause a bias. There is already a preconceived notion that may impact how the probation officers interact with individuals who have ASP traits. These preconceived biases can increase the possibility of recommending harsher punishment. The participants mentioned these individuals being labeled as crazy, being manipulative, and lacking credibility.

Emergent Theme 5

Theme 5 is essential to the research question because it focuses on the probation officers' challenges working with individuals who have ASP traits compared to other populations (see Table 4). The participants mentioned strategies they implement and challenges perceived when dealing with an individual who has ASP traits.

Table 4

Meaning Units and Emergent Theme 5

Meaning unit	Theme 5
A need for more patience Heightened awareness Setting strict boundaries	Challenges faced while working with individuals with antisocial personality traits

The participants reported differences when working with individuals who have ASP traits compared to other populations. P3 reported,

> Sometimes the traits are masked. So, I can't really say that. I can't really say that there's a difference. But I can um, I just think they need a little more time, and you just have to understand that's the only difference. Like, once you understand it, congrats, that how their mind works, you will be able to adjust yourself to be able to be able to deal with them.

P4 stated,

> Diagnosed with antisocial I know they're gonna maybe push some limits, and they're gonna have poor self-control, versus someone who's, you know, diagnosed with depression, who I may have to like, push a little bit more to get going on some days when they're having significant symptoms.

P7 similarly stated,

> This group here requires a little bit more patience, right cause their antisocial defiant and we have to figure out why the reason why. A reason to why they are acting when they act and it takes us a little time to figure out what is that reason.

P8 offered the following reflection:

> I mean, I think the biggest thing is that we have to be really careful that we are not being manipulated. So, like, if I have clients that kind of display those behaviors, I'll bounce ideas off of my supervisor.

For Theme 5, the participants noted differences when working with individuals who have ASP traits compared to other individuals. The participants noted they had to develop more patience, heightened their awareness, and set strict boundaries. The participants mentioned strategies they implement to deal with individuals with ASP traits.

Emergent Theme 6

Theme 6 is about the probation officers' feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed (see Table 5). The participants were asked if they had any feeling or burnout or being overwhelmed and majority stated they had feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed. One participant even mentioned implementing self-care as a way of coping with the burnout. Two participants denied feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed.

Table 5

Meaning Units and Emergent Theme 6

Meaning unit	Theme 6
Feelings of burnout and instilling self-care	Feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed

At times, feelings of burnout and overwhelm

The majority of the participants reported feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed as probation officers. P1 reported,

> It's worn out because it's just, it's just constantly battling. It's just constantly like you trying to get them to do something, and then them not wanting to do it. And so it's just it's it does feel hopeless or pointless at times, because you feel like you're doing everything right to get them to do the right thing, and they're just throwing the middle finger in your face and saying, I'm not going to do it. So there is a level of burnout.

P4 stated, “Oh, yes, definitely, burnout or overwhelmed by supervising individuals with antisocial personality traits.” P6 shared, “Just sometimes I need a break to take a break and I do practice self-care and I think that helps a lot and then you know sometimes like OK. I got this and just keep moving.”

Theme 6 is significant for the research question because it provides an understanding of how the experiences of the probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits are causing feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed. The participants acknowledged a sense of burnout or feeling overwhelmed. Some of the participants mentioned that some self-care was necessary to deal with the burnout. The feeling of burnout fluctuated for some of the participants. Two participants denied feeling burned out because one reported it would signify that they had given up, and the other because they felt prepared.

Summary

This study centered on the research question: What are the experiences of probation officers working with adults who have ASP traits? This research question was answered through collecting data from semistructured phone call interviews, resulting in meaning units and themes that captured the essence of the experiences from the participants' perspectives. The themes showed that participants became probation officers due to wanting to help others and reentry, receive mandatory annual training, mentioned biases or misconceptions when hearing the words ASP traits and mental health illness, elaborated on the different challenges when working with individuals with ASP traits compared to other populations, how recommendations are made to the judge, and experiencing feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed.

Throughout the interviews, participants describe their experiences working with ASP traits as requiring patience and being time-consuming. The participants reported the differences between individuals who have ASP traits and other populations, as well as the biases and misconceptions when hearing the words mental health illness and ASP traits. The participants mentioned individualized considerations when making recommendations to the judge, and experiencing feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed currently or at some point in their career. Not all the participants perceived this phenomenon in the same manner; however, there were enough similarities to determine the connections between the participants. Chapter 4 included the demographics, research setting, data analysis, data collection, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary. Chapter 5 consists of

the interpretations of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits. This chapter included interpretations of findings, implications, recommendations, and how this study can lead to positive social change. Previous research studies on probation officers and recommendations of punishment allowed for the gap to be identified in the literature, and to start my research study. The use of a descriptive qualitative phenomenological research design was the best choice for this research study. This chapter expounds on the current research study and contributes to the field.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this investigation revealed that probation officers' experience working with individuals who have ASP traits can reveal bias and misconceptions, impacts on recommendations to the judge, and can lead to feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed. The information from this phenomenological research study provided a clear outlook on probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits.

The participants described their experiences working with ASP traits as requiring patience and being time-consuming. The participants reported the differences between individuals who have ASP traits and other populations, as well as the biases and misconceptions when hearing the words mental health illness and ASP traits. The

participants mentioned experiencing feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed currently or at some point in their careers. The findings confirmed Berryessa and Wohlstetter's (2019) research study on biases and labels impacting recommendations of harsher punishment. The findings also extended on Lad and Walker (2020) research study that focused on probation officer's experiences working with individuals who meet criteria for a diagnosis of ASPD. This research study focused on the individuals who do not meet criteria for ASPD but rather demonstrate ASP traits. ASPD is difficult to diagnose due to credibility, funding, and biases.

Data was collected via semi structured interviews with nine participants. Data saturation was reached with these nine participants. All participants were probation officers who offered narratives of their experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. Findings resulted in six emergent themes and one subtheme that stemmed from the semi structured interviews.

Participants reported becoming a probation officer because of a sense of helping others and reentry. Participants' recollection of their experience provided insight as to why their experience led them to become a probation officer. P3 mentioned becoming a probation officer because they "were better off working with reentry" than when they were working at an "institution." P4 spoke about their experience working with children and families as the reason they became a probation officer to help an individual early on in life. P5 similarly stated he wanted "to help people and promote positive changes."

P1 through P9 reported a bias and misconception were hearing the words mental health illness and ASP traits. P9 mentions having to be "hyper aware" when dealing with

someone who has mental health issues. P8 stated, “It can make it seem like the client is completely uncaring, completely not remorseful.” The theme of bias and misconception connects to the themes of how recommendations are made to the judge and the theme of challenges faced when working with individuals who have ASP traits.

All of the participants mentioned using a criterion for how they make recommendations to the judge. No criterion that was applied across the board, but rather an individualized conception of what was needed for making a recommendation to the judge. The participants mentioned considering different factors such as the individual's criminal history, new violation, employment, and family. Overall, the recommendations were based on the probation officer's interpretation of these factors.

Participants reported their experience working with individuals who have ASP traits compared to other populations. Participants reported a difference in working with individuals who have ASP traits. P9 described individuals with ASP traits as “very resistant.” P4 described these individuals as “lacking empathy.”

The majority of the participants mentioned mandatory annual training being offered for working with individuals with ASP traits; however, this was not always the case, as P7 reported that they have “specialized certified individual officers” who deal with the “mental health caseload.” P9 also spoke about not receiving training due to having mental health officers who “have a more specialized training.”

Participants reported their experiences working as a probation officer and having worked with different populations has caused feelings of burnout and overwhelmed. Some of the participants reported feeling burned out or overwhelmed at some point in

their career, as others mentioned currently being overwhelmed. P7 denied feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed because it would be seen as “giving up”; however, there is enough of a connection between the participants to reflect probation officers' feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed.

While this study was not inclusive of all probation officers’ experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits, these participants’ narratives provided information regarding experiences that may cause feelings of burnout, the thought process when making recommendations to the judge, and the possibility of harsher punishment because of bias and misconceptions, and their individualized considerations.

All participants were at least 18 years old, reside in the United States, had completed their probationary year, and actively worked with individuals who have ASP traits. All but three of the participants worked for the State probation, while the others worked for the federal system. The participants were primarily female, with only 3 male participants.

The subtheme for theme 2 that emerged showed that participants make recommendations to the judge based on guidelines/law and several other factors, such as criminal history, employment, and family. The factors were based on the participants’ own interpretation of what was necessary to be able to make the recommendation to the judge. Some of the participants looked at the individual’s criminal past, while others looked into the victim's remorse and their demeanor. P2 mentioned making recommendations based “upon the laws and my experience,” and P9 stated looking at the individual’s current status and “statutes and procedures and Federal criminal guidelines.”

Overall, the researcher's results showed that the probation officers would use their own experience and individualized considerations when making recommendations to the judge, as well as considering guidelines and laws.

Lastly, the researcher's results showed that probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits impact the recommendations they make to the judge, a preconceived bias towards ASP traits and mental health illness, and feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed, regardless of their reason for becoming a probation officer and hours of training.

Theoretical Foundation

Bandura's SCT served as the theoretical framework for this research study, which effectively addressed the research question. The theoretical framework used aligned and provided insight into the gap in the literature and the probation officer's experiences when working with individuals with ASP traits. The researcher in this study used Bandura's SCT as the basis for understanding how certain factors influence human learning behaviors (Bandura, 1986). The learned behavior allowed me to understand the experiences and the way probation officers deal with different cases involving ASP traits.

SCT considers how environmental and cognitive/behavioral factors influence human learning and behavior (Bandura, 1986). The focus of SCT is on how learned behavior occurs through the process of observing others. Albert Bandura is the founding father who proposed SCT and believes that observational learning cannot occur unless cognitive processes are at work. Bandura believed individuals did not observe behavior and then imitate it. Instead, he believed these individuals were thinking before imitating

the behavior. In essence, an individual observing the individual may interpret it as an imitation because of what they are seeing, but the individual imitating the behavior is processing the information.

SCT applies to the proposed research study in various aspects: (1) because it identified the factors related to the experience of the probation officers, (2) guided scholarly readers on the functions of the criminal justice system, and (3) provided insight as to why individuals make certain choices, such as recommendations of punishment (Bandura, 1986). The logical connection between the framework presented and the nature of my study includes a discussion of two factors that influence the experiences of probation officers (Bandura, 1986). The first one is environmental, otherwise known as surroundings, such as people, places, and/or things. A second factor that impacts an individual's experiences is cognitive/behavioral aspects, such as a belief system (Bandura, 1986). The experiences of probation officers are influenced by learned behavior (Lad & Walker, 2022). Thus, the use of SCT gives an understanding of how learned behaviors impact the experiences of these probation officers when dealing with individuals with ASP traits. By understanding how learned behaviors impact their experiences, we could decrease the stigma in the officer-client relationship, leading to better legal recommendations and proper treatment.

It is important to understand that there is a negative stigma that may be learned through one's experiences. Specifically, a probation officer's experiences may indicate how individuals with ASP traits may impact how they interpret information (Lad &

Walker, 2022). SCT helps us understand how learned behaviors impact the experiences of the probation officer.

Limitations of the Study

This study offered a comprehensive description of the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals with ASP traits. The semi structured interviews allowed the participants to validate their experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits.

This study focuses solely on the lived experiences of probation officers working with individuals who have ASP traits, thus limiting the ability to generalize these findings and apply them to other agencies or those who have not worked with individuals with ASP traits. The limitation may present some concerns regarding the sample size and target populations; however, the goal of the sample size is guided by the richness of the data, examination complexity, time constraint, and data delivery (Creswell, 2014).

Social desirability bias is a limitation, as participants' narratives were taken at face value, and there is no way to verify the truthfulness of their statements. Another limitation is that this is based on the participant's perspective of the phenomenon and what they consider ASP traits, their different experiences, which can impact future research, as these factors can affect the individual experience.

Due to the nature of the study, there is the potential for social desirability bias, which happens when a participant adjusts or presents their reality in a way that they perceive to be more socially acceptable than their true reality (Bergen & Labonte, 2019).

Recommendations

Qualitative research refers to a perceived model based on the phenomenon and the resulting identifiable themes. The final sample size was determined by reaching data saturation, which resulted in nine participants. As the data was analyzed, meaning units emerged that were used to identify the emergent themes that were based on the participants' narratives.

This research fills a gap in research on probation officers lived experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. While the target population for this study was confined to probation officers, another study could view this phenomenon from the perspective of other departments in the criminal justice system, or other law enforcement agencies, or academic institutions.

Probation officers regularly make recommendations to the judge. Due to the impact the recommendations would have on individuals who have ASP traits and on recidivism rates, a recommendation is for the State and Federal systems to approve a guideline or law that is consistent across the board. This would limit the probation officer's perceptions and what they deem important to consider. Especially when there is a preconceived bias and misconception about individuals who have ASP traits.

Another recommendation would be to implement a standardized caseload size for individuals who have ASP traits in order to reduce feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed. Probation officers are reporting that individuals with ASP traits are time consuming and require more effort.

A final recommendation is to develop targeted mental health programs that can help the criminal justice system and other law enforcement agencies initially identify ASP traits and understand these traits. An initial targeted mental health program would effectively address the psychological impact of probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits and challenge their biases and misconceptions.

As previously mentioned, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to probation officers' experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. This study solely focused on probation officers who live within the United States and have worked with individuals who have ASP traits. Future research can use this study to build upon research on probation officers who do not live within the United States and have worked with individuals with ASP traits.

Implications

This study substantiated the assumption that harsher punishments, lack of resources, and feelings of burnout or being overwhelmed continued to be a persistent problem in the criminal justice system, and were revealed by the lived experiences of probation officers. Exploring the perspectives of the probation officers provided insight as to the lack of resources, feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed, and the possibility of recommendations of harsher punishments that arise when working with individuals who have ASP traits. The study on probation officers' experiences was important to understanding the impact their experiences have on the criminal justice system when it comes to recidivism rates, harsher punishment, and feelings of burnout. The findings showed that changes need to be made within the criminal justice system

when it comes to individuals who do not meet the criteria for ASPD but rather demonstrate ASP traits.

The researchers' findings showed that it is important to provide resources to the probation officers on how to manage working with individuals who have ASP traits and how to mitigate any preconceived biases. The probation officers' biases make them hyper vigilant and defensive expecting the individual with ASP to be manipulative or lack credibility. These biases can cause the probation officer to recommend harsher punishment.

Conclusion

This study was necessary to highlight the experiences of probation officers who work with individuals who have ASP traits in order to be able to promote social change within the criminal justice system and the general community. This research was conducted with nine participants using a semi structured interview that allowed them to offer their lived experiences working with individuals who have ASP traits. Participants shared their experiences, biases, training, the way they make recommendations, and any feelings of burnout they may have encountered.

The responses from each of the participants resulted in six emergent themes to generalize the participants' experiences. The themes were: a) Became a probation officer to help others and reentry (b) Recommendation to the judge and decision-making based on individualized considerations (c) Mandatory annual training for probation officers (d) Biases and misconceptions of mental health and ASP traits (e) Challenges faced while working with individuals with ASP traits and (f) Feelings of burnout and being

overwhelmed. The findings in this phenomenological study helped fill the gap in previous studies on recommendations of harsher punishments, lack of resources, and feelings of burnout. The experiences of the participants provided insight as to what role their experience has played in decision-making. The findings can contribute to enhancing and implementing strategies that promote positive social change for those in the criminal justice system, as well as those who do not meet criteria for a diagnosis of ASPD. Positive social change can also be promoted by those in the community. Additionally, the findings and implications of this study can extend beyond probation officers and be used for other agencies working with individuals who have ASP traits.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you very much for participating in this study. As a probation officer who works with individuals with mental health issues, this may be a sensitive topic. All of your information will remain confidential, and the answers will only be used for research purposes. For your participation, you will receive a $10 gift card.

Research Question:

RQ: What are the experiences of probation officers working with adults with antisocial personality traits?

1. Why did you decide to become a probation officer?
    a. What has been your experience working as a probation officer?
    b. Did you get to choose your caseload, or was it automatically assigned to you?
    c. Do you believe you have a good caseload, or is it difficult to manage?
2. Do you believe you are able to complete your job in an effective manner? Why or why not?
3. How do you make recommendations to the judge?
    a. What role do recidivism rates play in probationers?
    b. What factors do you take into account for your recommendations?
4. Tell me about the training you were provided to supervise individuals who display mental health disorders.
    a. What resources did you find available to you?

5. Do you believe hearing the words mental health, ASP traits, or serious mental illness can cause potential biases? If so, what could those biases be?
6. Has supervising individuals with a mental health disorder ever influenced how you do your job?
    a. If so, how did it influence your job?
7. Tell me about your first experience working with an individual who displayed antisocial personality disorder traits.
    a. How did that experience impact you?
    b. Can you tell me any differences between working with this population and other individuals?
8. How prepared do you believe you are to supervise a probationer with antisocial personality disorder traits?
9. What do you wish you had known about working with this population?
    a. Tell me how you might have approached your first individual differently if you had this information.
10. What else should I know about your experiences with working with individuals with antisocial personality disorder traits?
    a. Do you feel burnout or overwhelmed by supervising individuals with ASP traits?

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

You are invited to share your views for a study titled: Probation Officers' Experiences Working With Individuals Who Have Antisocial Personality Traits

This is a new study about the experiences of probation officers who have active experience working with individuals who have Antisocial Personality traits that could help the criminal justice system and community scholars better understand and provide resources for probation officers.

About the study:

- One 45–60-minute phone interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- You would receive a $10 Amazon gift card as a thank-you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Reside in the United States
- Currently working or previously worked with individuals who have antisocial personality traits
- Have completed their probationary year

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Katherine Stephanie Ore, a Ph.D.student at Walden University. Interviews will take place on April 2025.

To confidentially volunteer, contact the researcher:

Katherine S. Ore: [telephone number redacted] or XXXXXXX